

SERMONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS

AND

OCCASIONS.

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SERMON



 S E R M O N I.

P S A L M XXXVII. 31.

*The Law of his GOD is in his Heart:
None of his Steps shall slide.*

AMONG those unhappy Consequences, which *Disputes* about Religion are usually found to draw after them, *this* is none of the least considerable; that, whilst they unsettle the Minds of Many, and actually *overthrow the Faith of Some*, they too generally draw off the *Attention* of Others from what always ought to be the *principal Object* of it. 'Tis true, *Knowledge* may, by this Means, *be increas'd*; so that most Men shall become qualify'd, at least shall think themselves qualify'd, to discuss these Points with Skill and Subtility. But, I fear, we are too apt to *rest* here: — to consider Religion as a Matter of *Notion only* and Speculation; as calculated for the Purposes of *Intellectual Entertainment*, rather than

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of *Vital Improvement* in Virtue and Holiness: And, if *so*, our Concern about *Religion ends* where it ought only to *begin*; whilst We make that the *whole Business* of It, which is indeed no more than an *Introduction* to It.

Religion has *not always* been thus treated. In the *Psalmist's* Days particularly, We find, It was thought worthy, not only to fill the *Heads*, and to employ the *Tongues*, but to warm the *Hearts*, of Its Professors. ^a *The Mouth of the Righteous Man*, it seems, as Opportunities offer'd themselves, was *exercised in Wisdom*, and his *Tongue wou'd be talking of Judgment*. So much Regard, he well knew, the Importance of *Divine Truths* demanded from him. But then, ^b *out of the Abundance of the Heart his Mouth spake* on such Occasions. Nor was his Discourse only instructive, but his Life unblameable, because his Sense of Religion was *heartly* and affectionate. *The Law of his God was in his Heart*: Therefore *None of his Steps did slide*.

And, however the *Professors* of Religion may be *alter'd*, the *Nature* of Things is still *the same*. That Religion, which will ever be of *real Service* in the Regulation of our Conduct, must still be, as it was then, seated in the *Heart*. ^c *Out of the Heart are the Issues*

^a Psal. XXXVII. 30. ^b Mat. XII. 34. ^c Prov. IV. 23.



of Life; and, Nothing will be able effectually to give Motion and Direction to our several Powers, which does not *first* affect this *main Spring* within Us. In proportion as Religion is or is not the *Ruling Principle* in the *Heart*, Its Influence on Men's whole outward Behaviour will be powerful and prevailing, or weak only and precarious. When *the Law of his God is in a Man's Heart*, then and *then only*, *None of his Steps shall slide*.

The Words contain a short, but just, *Description* of one *Principal Ingredient* in the Upright Man's Character, and an engaging *Recommendation* of it from its *happy Effect* upon his Conduct. And, in order to consider them as usefully as may be, I shall endeavour, in the *plainest* Manner I can,

- I. *First*, To shew, What is *imply'd* in the Expression, "*The Law of his God is in his Heart*;" and, Who is *intitl'd* to that *Character*.
- II. *Secondly*, To illustrate the *Beneficial Influence* of such a Principle, here express'd by its preserving a Man's *Steps from Sliding*. And,
- III. *Thirdly*, To subjoin an *useful Inference* or two, resulting from the foregoing Heads.

I. By *the Law of God*, it is obvious to understand in general, *That Rule of our Actions which is bound upon our Consciences by the Authority of God*, in what Way soever the Particulars of it come to our Knowledge.

The *Heart* is in Scripture variously used to signify the *Understanding*, the *Memory* or the *Affections*: And according to any of these Acceptations *the Law of God* may be said to be *in the Heart*; Indeed It *must* be so in *each* of them, fully to answer the Character now before Us. — And,

I. To have *the Law of God in the Heart* is to have it in the *Understanding*: That is, not only to have a full Conviction of the Being of God, and proper Notions of His Attributes; but to be well acquainted with His Will and our own Duty in the several Branches of it. This is what the *Psalmist* elsewhere expresses by ^a *having Understanding in the Way of Godliness*. And, how necessary it is to have *the Law of God in the Heart* in *This* Sense of the Word *previously* to the others, is (I suppose) too evident to need any Illustration. A due Degree of Knowledge in the Nature and Particulars of God's Law is so necessary a Preparative to the regular Observance of it, that We can scarce take one Step right with-

^a Psal. CI. 2.

out it. Nay our very *Zeal*, if not under the Guidance of *Knowledge*, instead of *holding up our Goings*, will often be to Us *an Occasion of Falling*. This Point therefore must be *first* secured. — And then,

2. We must have *the Law of God in the Heart* as *That* stands for the *Thoughts* and *Memory*: That is, We must frequently *call forth* that *Knowledge*, which is in the *Mind* *habitually*, into its *actual View* and *Perception*. This it what the *Psalmist* calls ^a *meditating in the Law of God*, and *exercising* one's *self in it*: And This He, with great Reason, represents as being the Good Man's Employment *Day and Night*. For, 'tis certain, *vain* will the most compleat *Knowledge* of God's Will be, if not *frequently* brought to *Remembrance*. *Truth* will ever be found to influence Men's Practice in proportion, not as it is *known*, but as it is *attended to*, by them. Temptations when *present* will easily overpower such Persuasions as are *only habitual*. And, in fact, more Souls are *destroy'd* for Want of *Consideration*, than for *Lack of Knowledge*. — However,

3. The *Law of God*, to have its proper Efficacy, must not only be in the Understanding and Memory, but also in the *Love* and

^a Psal. I. 2.

Affections. This is to have one's *Delight in the Law of GOD*; and is indeed the most *proper* Sense of having it *in the Heart*. 'Twas thus the *Pfalmist* was *Himself* affected towards it, when in the Overflowing of His Zeal He cry'd out, ^a "Oh, how I love Thy Law!" and again, ^b *The Law of Thy Mouth is dearer unto me, than Thousands of Gold and Silver.* — ^c We are inform'd by Some, who profess to have an intimate Acquaintance with Human Nature, that every Man has *some* one favourite Pursuit, some *ruling Passion*; to which all others are only subordinate, and so, in case of Interference, constantly give Way. Now *This*, in the Person I am describing, must be *the Law of GOD*; that is, a Regard to GOD's Authority, a Desire of Pleasing, and a Dread of offending Him. ^d *GOD's Loving-Kindness is to such a Man better than Life itself*; and Nothing will be allow'd to stand in Competition with Obedience to His Commands.

Upon the Whole: The Man, that wou'd be *entitled* to the *Character* in my Text must neglect no Opportunities of *informing himself aright* concerning the Divine Will and his own Duty: Which Knowledge, when attained, he must not suffer to lye *dormant* within

^a Pſal. CXIX. 97.

^b Ibid. 72.

^c Essay on Man.

^d Pſal. LXIII. 3.

him; but must call it forth into *actual View* with Frequency and Seriousness; as a Matter, not to be confined to the *Head*, but to engage the *Heart*; to be recollected and review'd, not for the Purposes only of *Speculation*, but as a *Rule of Conduct* bound upon his *Conscience* by the Author of his Being, and the Disposer of his Happiness: 'Till the *Importance* of God's Law, and a Regard to His Authority, becomes a Consideration always *present* with his Mind, always *uppermost* there; a Principle *ruling in his Heart*, and effectually diffusing its *Vital Influence* over his Whole Life and Conversation.

This, I conceive, is the Import of the Expression, "*the Law of his GOD is in his Heart*;" and such the Person intitled to That Character. The Excellency of which, and the great Reason and Encouragement We have to aspire after it, may appear by considering,

II. *Secondly*, The *Beneficial Influence* of such a Principle, as here express'd by its preserving a Man's *Steps from Sliding*.

The Expression is *figurative*; and may denote the *Security* and the *Steadiness* of a Man's Conduct: And in both respects the Principle of an awful Regard to the Divine Will is highly beneficial. It gives *Security* from Er-

ror, from *Sin*, from *Misery*; and it gives *Steadiness* and *Consistency*, and by that Means *Self-Complacency* and *Dignity*, to the Person possess'd of it. All This a Religious Principle, seated in the *Heart*, procures; generally, I mean, and *for the most part*, tho' not *universally* or *without Exception*: And that both by the *Blessing* of God, and from its own *Natural Tendency*.

And first, A sincerely devout Frame of Mind secures to Us the above-mention'd Advantages by conciliating the *Blessing* of Almighty God. How necessary the Divine Favour is to the right ordering of our Steps, every *thinking* Man feels, and every *ingenuous* Man will acknowledge. Accordingly the Book of *Psalms*, (that invaluable Treasure of the most exalted Strains of *rational* Piety,) is every where full of Petitions to this Purpose. The *Royal Penman* had in himself experienced the Inability of *Man* by his own Wisdom to direct his Steps, or by his own Strength to preserve them from falling. Hence We find him continually imploring the Divine Direction and Support. ^a *Order my Steps in Thy Word, and so shall no Wickedness have Dominion over me!* And again — ^b *Oh, hold Thou*

^a Psal. CXIX. 133.

^b Ibid. XVII. 5.

up my Goings in Thy Paths, that my Foot-steps slip not !

Now, if any Thing *may*, by the Light of Nature, *be known of* GOD, or with Certainty collected from thence concerning His Methods of Governing the Moral World ; of *this* We may be assured, that He will in a more especial Manner favour and regard Those of His Children, whose *Hearts* are *warm'd* with an affectionate Concern for the Honour of His Laws, and a *filial Awe* of His Authority. We are not, however, left to the Deductions of our *Reason* in this Particular ; GOD Himself having, in His *Holy Word*, given Us many explicit Declarations to the same Purpose : Among which the following is introduced with a Solemnity so remarkable, that, as I must not pass by it, so I need not add to it any other. — ^a *Thus saith the High and Lofty one, that inhabiteth Eternity ! whose Name is Holy ! I dwell in the high and holy Place ; with him also that is of a contrite and humble Spirit : And again, by the same Prophet, —* ^b *To This Man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite Spirit, and that trembleth at my Word !*

But farther ; The Temper of Mind here recommended, is not only by GOD's *Promise*

^a *Isai. LVII. 15.*

^b *Ibid. LXVI. 6.*

entitled to receive, but has, in the Course of His Providence, an *Aptness* to *procure*, the Advantages above hinted at. And *This* You will now permit me to illustrate, a little more particularly, in regard to *each* of Those Advantages, in the *Order* wherein I have already recited them.

I. To *begin* with That of *Security* from *Error*; and this both in Matters wherein our *Belief*, and those in which our *Practice* is concern'd.

Where the Principle of a true and rational Piety has taken Possession of the *Heart*, Error in Religious Matters, especially such as carries Men to the Lengths of *Schism*, *Herefy*, or *Infidelity*, will not ordinarily find Admittance. A Man of *This* Frame of Mind proceeds in his Enquiries with Calmness and Sedateness, with Impartiality and Freedom from Prejudice, with Modesty and Humility. His *Understanding* is well prepared for *perceiving* the Evidences of Religion or of any fundamental Article of It; and his *Will* has no Reluctance, no Objection, to *admitting* them. If in his Progress he finds (as even a sincere Enquirer may find) *some Things hard to be understood*; he will not presently give up what is *plain* and *evident*, for the sake of what as yet may seem somewhat *doubtful* or *difficult*.
Difficul-

Difficulties, he considers, must, from the Nature of Things, attend our Religion, *supposing it True*; and *These* therefore he will by no means admit as *Proofs that It is not so*. He will, however, examine according to his Abilities, whether the Difficulties he meets with may not be *surmounted* by Patience and Attention; and, where *his own* Abilities fail him, he will not refuse to *call in* all proper Assistances; particularly Those of Persons, whom he has Cause to presume, and is *will-ing to believe*, wiser than himself; and *Their's* most especially, who are by God's own Appointment *set apart* for this Purpose. — The Truth is, 'tis from *Half-Thinking*, not *Free-Thinking*, that dangerous Error or Infidelity commonly arise; as again, such *Half-Thinking* is generally occasion'd by the Want of an hearty Desire to *know* and to *do* the *Will of God*. Where *the Heart* is not animated by *the Law of God*, the Man will probably exert just Thought enough (and a very *little Thought* will be sufficient) to raise a few *Doubts* about our Holy Religion, without farther troubling *himself* to pursue them to any rational Conclusion, or vouchsafing to seek for any Solution of them from *others*: Or, it may be, he has been far enough *from Home* to have seen much *Hypocrisy* or much *Bigotry*
under

under the Profession of *Christianity*; and he will not be persuaded, but that every *Appearance* of It is fairly resolvable into one or other of these Principles: Nay, if *Vanity* or *vicious Prejudice* strongly predominate in his Constitution, He may perhaps be at the Pains of *working up* such Difficulties or such Abuses in Religion into *formidable Objections* against It. — But where *sincere Piety* and a *sound Mind* happily unite in conducting the important Enquiry, the Case is far otherwise: The Arguments in Favour of every Divine Institution will have *their due Weight*, and Those against It *no more than* their due Weight: And then, We need neither be ^a *ashamed of the Gospel of CHRIST*, nor afraid lest It shou'd fail of approving Itself, to *such* an Enquirer, as being ^b *the Power of GOD and the Wisdom of GOD*; however Its Doctrines may, to the superficial or the conceited Thinker, be *a Stumbling-Block*; and its Precepts, to the vicious and debauch'd Liver, *Foolishness*.

And, as This is generally found true of Misconceptions in Matters of *Faith*, so is it no less applicable to Errors of a *Moral Nature*, or such as more immediately relate to the *Conduct of Life*. A *sincere Resolution* to act agreeably to *the Law of GOD*, is ordinarily

^a Rom. I. 16.

^b 1 Cor. I. 23, 24.

one of the most *faithful Interpreters* of it. It holds good in relation to *Practice* as well as *Belief*, that ^a *if any Man will do GOD's Will, or is ready and desirous to do it, he shall know of the Action or Undertaking, whether it be of GOD or not.* He, who has the Authority of GOD always *uppermost* upon his Mind, and who resolves, *at all Hazards*, to submit his Actions to it, usually finds his Duty lying *plainly enough* before him. Mistakes about Practice generally arise from some perverse Inclination, some impetuous Desire, some ^b *car-nal Affection not subject to the Law of GOD.* These first make Men deliberate about Questions, which to an *honest and good Heart* wou'd have been no Questions at all; and then *hurry them on* to a Determination of the affected Debate agreeably to the *Strength*, not of *Evidence* in the Thing, but of *Inclination* in themselves. Hence ^c *the Way of the Wicked is said to be as Darkness; and the Wicked are represented as* ^d *Groping in the Dark at Noon-Day:* They perplex themselves in the clearest Cases: And, no wonder; since, in this Sense also, ^e *they love Darkness rather than Light, because their Intentions and Desires are Evil.* — On the contrary, the Up-

^a Joh. VII. 17.^b Rom. VIII. 7.^c Prov. IV. 19.^d Job V. 14.^e Joh. III. 19.

right Man sees his Duty *clearly*, because he is willing to perform it *conscientiously*. ^a *The Path of the Just is as the shining Light, which shineth more and more unto a perfect Day.* — But,

2. *Secondly*, An affectionate and awful Regard to the Authority of GOD is a most effectual Preservative against *Sin* and *Wickedness*.

This is indeed a Point so evident, that it will hardly admit of any Illustration. *Sin*, in the very Notion of it, is a *Transgression of God's Law*: And, 'tis certain, all wilful Transgression of God's Law must proceed, if not from a *settled Disbelief* of His Providence, at least from a *present Disregard* of the important Consequences of it. Accordingly ^b *My Heart sheweth me the Wickedness of the Ungodly* (saith the *Psalmist*) *that there is no Fear of God before his Eyes*. Into the Want of This Principle He justly resolves all the Vices and Villanies of which Men are guilty. And, in fact, where this Principle is wanting, no Sense of *Honour*, no Fear of *Disgrace*, no Dread of *Punishment*, will be a sufficient Security. — But ^c *the Law of the LORD is perfect, converting the Soul; the Testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple*. The Fear of GOD will preserve a Man's Innocence, when No-

^a Prov. IV. 18. ^b Psal. XXXVI. 1. ^c Ibid. XIX.

thing else can reach him. *The Darknefs is no Darknefs*, can promise no Concealment, and is therefore no Temptation, to that Man, who has always upon his Mind a prevailing Sense of *His* Prefence, ^a *to whom Darknefs and Light are both alike*. There is no Engagement fo preffing as not to allow *Time* to ask This fhort Queftion, “^b *How can I do This great Wickednefs and fin againft GOD?*” And This Queftion, when properly attended to, muft needs filence the moft inviting Solicitation. The Enticements of Pleafure, and even the Dread of the moft powerful human Repentment, every Allurement that can addrefs itfelf to that Part of our Nature in which we are moft weakly guarded, fhall fall before this one Confideration, — “^c *How CAN I do this great Wickednefs and fin againft GOD?*”

And, as a fincere Principle of Piety is a moft *powerful*, fo is it ufually a moft *lafting*, Prefervative againft Sin. Where a *filial Awe* of the Divine Being, an hearty *Defire* of *Obeying* and *Pleafing* Him, and a prevailing *Fear* of *Offending* Him, is *deeply* rooted in the Soul, fuch a Frame of Mind, notwithstanding the Depravity of our Nature, is feldom *completely* loft. *Over-power’d* indeed it may be for a Time; but it generally, fooner or later, *re-*

^a Pfal. CXXXIX. 12.

^b Gen. XXXIX. 9.

^c Ibid.

afferts

asserts its Dominion; and if, in the mean while, it cannot restrain the Man from Sin, it however makes his Progress in it less easy and agreeable; and gives the Overtures of Divine Grace a more advantageous Influence upon the Mind. Let ^a Jeroboam receive never so many awakening Intimations of God's Displeasure; let ^b his Right-Hand be dry'd up, and the Son of his Bosom cut off in the Flower of his Age; yet all This shall be lost upon him; for, we read, ^c after This Jeroboam returned not from his Evil Way, but persisted in his Impiety and Idolatry. But, let ^d David receive a seasonable Reproof from a Prophet, and He shall presently confess and lament his foul Offence, and ^e offer unto God the Sacrifice of a broken and contrite Heart. The Cause of so remarkably different a Reception of the Divine Chastisements was plainly This: — David was, in the prevailing Part of his Character, a Man of Piety, one who had the Law of his God in his Heart: Whilst Jeroboam appears to have been an entire Stranger to the Power of Godliness, and only for secular Purposes to have made Use of the Form of it. — So true is the Observation of Solomon in this Sense also; the ^f Just Man, He who has a

^a 1 Kin. XIII. 4.

^b Ibid. XIV.

^c Ibid. XIII. 33.

^d 2 Sam. XII. 13.

^e Psal. LI.

^f Prov. XXIV. 16.

right Principle, *falleth seven Times and riseth again; but the Wicked falleth into Mischief; because he falleth without Recovery.* Which brings me to shew,

3. *Thirdly*, That an hearty Regard to the Law of GOD is the *most secure Preservative* we can have against *Danger, Disappointment and Misery.*

I say, the *most secure Preservative*; because it must not be expected, in the *present State* of Things, that *Piety itself* shou'd be found an *infallible Security* against Danger or Disappointment, any more than against Errors or Failings. As ^a *there are Wicked Men, to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the Righteous; so there are Good Men, to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the Wicked.* And yet, notwithstanding This, there is great Reason to believe, the *real Happiness* of This Life, tho' not always the *seeming Prosperity* of it, is distributed among the Sons of Men with a more equitable Hand than careless Observers may be apt to imagine. And, if instead of forming due Judgments from *present Appearances*, We would ^b *remember the End*, and take into our Estimate the *whole* of GOD's Dispensations towards particular Persons, even in This Life; *we should* more rarely judge or *do amiss.*

^a Eccl. VIII. 14.

^b Ecclus. VII. 36.

* *There is a Way, which seemeth right unto a Man, but the End thereof are the Ways of Death.* We often vainly flatter ourselves, we shall gain some favourite Point, or avoid some dreaded Mischief, by some more certain and more *compendious* Method than that which *the Law of God* prescribes or allows of; and possibly *for some Time* all Things may look fair and promising. But infinite Wisdom hath innumerable Ways of *defeating* our best-concerted Projects, or even of rendering Us, perhaps, *still more unhappy* by the present seeming *Success* of them. ° *He that getteth Riches and not by Right, (says the Prophet) shall leave them in the Midst of his Days; and at his End shall be a Fool.* The same is true of every other Acquisition. No sooner are we departed from the safe *Road* of our Duty, but we have put ourselves out of God's Protection, and thrown ourselves at the Mercy of every *cross Accident*: Hence Disappointments and Afflictions; and these falling with *double Weight* upon a Mind, conscious of having brought them upon itself, and unsupported by the Aids and Comforts of Religion, those only *present Helps in Trouble*. — Whereas, so long as We continue in the *plain Path* of God's Commandments, We not only secure His

a Prov. XIV. 12.

b Jer. XVII. 11.

Favour, but engage the Friendship of the *valuable* Part of Mankind; We escape many Interferences and *Rencounters* with the Passions and the Vices of others, to which a Deviation from Duty wou'd have expos'd Us: And, shou'd any Persons, without Provocation given on our Part, be ill-disposed towards Us, They will scarcely, for their own Sakes, venture to ** harm us so long as we are Followers of that which is Good.* But (which is most considerable) if, after all, We shou'd be permitted by Providence to fall into Circumstances of *seeming Distress*; yet Disappointments will lose much of their Bitterness, and even Calamities of their Pressure, whilst We are conscious of having secured His *Loving-Kindness* who knows what is best for Us; and who is both able and willing to *b make all Things work together to Us for Good.*

Such then is the *Security* which a sincere Principle of Piety ordinarily gives a Man: Security from *Error*, from *Sin*, from *Misery*. And it is equally conducive to the *Steadiness* and *Consistency* of his Conduct: For in This Sense also, *None of his Steps shall slide.*

It is the *Prophet's* just Observation, that ** the Wicked are as the troubled Sea, when it cannot rest.* — The various and opposite Mo-

a 1 Pet. III. 13.

b Rom. VIII. 28.

c Isai. LVII. 20.

tives which *successively*, and not feldom *at the same Instant* of Time, *agitate* a Mind destitute of Religion, naturally create *Distraction* in deliberating, *Diffidence* in resolving, and *Inconstancy* in acting. A Man, in such a Situation, is always dissatisfy'd, and therefore always uneasy; and because always uneasy, ever unsettled. And accordingly we find him continually changing his Measures; and, as ^a *the doubled-minded Man* in Course must be, *unstable in all his Ways*. — How different the Case of *That Man*, who has *the Law of his God in his Heart*! He has a plain Rule, and an honest Mind to direct the Application of it. He first ^b *ponders well the Path of his Goings*, and then *turneth not to the Right-Hand or to the Left*. He first takes due Care to inform his Judgment, and then pursues what *That* tells him is right, *without Deviation*; as well knowing, what is right at one Time must be right for ever in the *same Circumstances*. He is steady without Obstinaey; and proceeds with *Uniformity* of Conduct, because ^c *with Singleness of Heart, fearing God*.

The Excellency of the Principle now before Us, in *this* Respect, might easily be pursued thro' every *Relation*, every *Station* and *Condition* of Life. But never is its Influence

^a Jam. I. 8.

^b Prov. IV. 26, 27.

^c Col. III. 22.

more seasonably exerted than in unquiet and intricate Times: At such Seasons, the Man possessed of it, will not needlessly expose himself to Danger; nor, where Danger is unavoidable, will he refuse *those Succours which Reason and Prudence offer*. But then, he absolutely rejects all *Expedients* inconsistent with God's Law: And, after the Use of fair and honest Means, is not afraid to trust Providence with the Issue. In the Result, such a Man generally extricates himself with more Honour and more Satisfaction, than any of those Projectors, who have not God in all their Thoughts. And, whilst these Latter, after ^a *Kindling a Fire and Compassing themselves with Sparks*, and for some Time vainly walking in the Light of their Fire and in the Sparks that they have kindled, shall lye down in Sorrow: ^b *Unto the Upright there ariseth Light in the Darknes* — Light, to direct his Steps, to chear his Heart, to clear up his Innocence, and to ^c *make his Just-Dealing as the Noon-Day*.

And now, upon a View of the foregoing Particulars, We may see the *Justness* of the Psalmist's Declaration, ^d *“ Blessed is the Man,*

^a Isai. L. 11.

^b Psal. CXII. 4.

^c Ibid. XXXVII. 6.

^d Ibid. LXXXIV. 5.

“ *whose Strength is in Thee! in whose Heart
“ are Thy Ways!*” and the great Reason each
of us hath to implore the Divine Grace in his
Language, ^a “ *Oh, knit my Heart unto Thee,
“ that I may fear Thy Name.*” — But I hasten,
as was propos'd,

III. *Thirdly and Lastly*, To subjoin an *In-
ference* or two, arising from what has
been said.

And, in the *First* Place, You will, from
what has appear'd, readily infer with me, *The
great Usefulness and Importance of a Good Edu-
cation of Youth.*

We have seen, what Advantages arise from
having the *Law of God* in the *Understand-
ing*, the *Memory*, and the *Affections*. But at
no Season of Life can this great Point be so
well secured as in *tender Years*. 'Tis then
Truths of a Moral or Religious Nature find
their Way most easily into the *Understanding*,
make the deepest Impression in the *Memory*,
and take the most lasting Hold of the *Affec-
tions*. 'Tis *then* good Principles are most rea-
dily acquired; and Principles *then* acquired
are least liable to be over-power'd or lost.

It is one great Misfortune in Man's *present
Constitution*, that He has not only ^b *a Law*

^a Psal. LXXXVI. 11.

^b Rom. VII. 23.

in his Members warring against the Law in his Mind, but that this *carnal Principle* has the Advantage of *First Possession*. The Powers of the *Mind* continue for some Years in a Kind of *Non-Age*, whilst those of *Sense* and *Appetite* are daily advancing to a considerable Degree of Strength and Vigour : By which Means these Latter have often so far gain'd the Ascendant, as to render it extremely difficult for *Reason* and *Conscience* ever afterwards to dispossess them. Now an early good Education is an excellent Remedy against this Inconvenience. Places of Education are a Kind of *Publick Repositories*, from whence that *Observation* and *Experience* and Justness of Thought, which the Young Person has not of his *own Growth*, is apply'd to his Use out of the *common Stock* ; and hence also not only *Knowledge* is dispensed to yet unfurnish'd Minds, but *Restraint* and *Discipline* to Appetites yet capable of being regulated by them. Hence, in short, the *Intellectual* Faculties receive proper *Assistance*, whilst the *Sensitive* are kept within their *due Bounds*. Should this Proceeding be call'd, *Instilling of Prejudices* ; I see not any Thing so very formidable in the Charge. If Youth be by *Nature* in some Degree prejudiced against Virtue and Goodness, and wou'd be much more so by *Custom* and *Example* ;
what

what Method can be better suited to the Exigencies of our present Condition, than that of seasonably *counter-acting* those Prejudices by others of a more salutary Tendency, and more agreeable to the genuine and undepraved Constitution of our Minds ; such as are calculated to restore our *Reason* to its just Pre-eminence, and to re-instate *Conscience* in that Dominion for which It was originally design'd ? Or, where can be the mighty Harm of *rescuing* those Souls ^a *from the Snare of the Devil, who* wou'd otherwise be *taken Captives by him at his Will* ; and of rendering them ^b *Vessels unto Honour, sanctify'd and meet for their proper Master's Use, and prepared unto every good Work* ?

Again : As We may, from what has been said, observe the Advantages of an early good Education ; so 'tis obvious to infer farther, *What ought to be the principal Aim and Employment of it.*

^c *Wherewithal then shou'd a Young Man be taught to cleanse his Way ? Even by ruling himself after God's Word.* 'Tis *This*, We have seen, which *alone* will be able to conduct Us thro' the several Stages of Life with *Security* and *Steadiness* : This therefore is the Point which ought always to be in the View both

^a 2 Tim. II. 26.

^b Ibid. 21.

^c Psal. CXIX. 9.

of *Teacher* and *Learner*. Other Knowledge may undoubtedly be highly *Ornamental* and highly *Useful*, nay to different Persons in different Degrees highly *necessary*. But, after all, 'tis *the Fear of God* that must *cleanse our Way*, which must *sanctify* all our Pursuits, and be both *the Beginning* and *End* of whatever deserves the Name of *Wisdom*. Young Minds must therefore, by all means, be season'd with an holy Awe and Reverence for *Him that ought to be feared*. If this necessary Principle, ^a *this good Seed*, be not *sown* in the Heart *now*, it will scarcely ever after *bring forth Fruit unto Perfection*; It will either fall upon *Hearts* already *harden'd* by an habitual Course of Sin; or, however, *the Cares of the World*, *the Deceitfulness of Riches*, or *the Lusts of other Things*, will be apt to *spring up with it and choak it*. But if it be sown early in the ^b *good Ground* of a pure and tender Heart, it will most probably rise in a plentiful Harvest of exemplary Virtue and Holiness.

We have the Force of an early Piety remarkably exemplify'd in the Case of *Obadiab*. He ^c *was Governour of the House to Ahab*; a King, who ^d *had sold himself to work Wicked-*

^a Comp. Matt. XIII. Mark IV. Luke VIII. ^b 2 Kin. XXII. 19. ^c 1 Kin. XVIII. 3. ^d Ibid. XVI. 33. And XXI. 25.

ness beyond all that were before him, and whose Wife Jezabel seems to have had Nothing so much at-heart as the ^a Destruction of all the LORD's Prophets. These were trying Circumstances. — For the first Favourite of such a Master, and the chief Officer in such a Court, notwithstanding his precarious Situation, and (as it were) in Despite of her Displeasure on whose Favour its Continuance must have greatly depended, — to hide the Prophets of the LORD by Fifty in a Cave, and to feed them with Bread and Water. — This was a Proceeding not very reconcileable with the Maxims of worldly Policy. And yet, we cease to wonder at a Conduct so uncommonly brave and generous, after Himself has explain'd the true Grounds of it, ^b “ I, thy Servant fear the LORD from my Youth.”

Once more : If the Advantages of an early Religious Education are so great ; *What Fruits may justly be expected, both by GOD and Man, from Those Persons, who happily enjoy this inestimable Benefit ?*

Need I remind You, how *eminently* many of *Us* are concern'd in *this* Reflection ? — Whilst the far greatest Part of Mankind about us are continually busied in ^c *Taking Thought for their Life what they shall eat and what*

^a 1 Kin. XVIII. 4.

^b Ibid. 12.

^c Matt. VI. 31.

they

they shall drink, and procuring by *the Sweat of their Faces* these necessary Accommodations of it; We are, by our very Situation, removed from the *bodily Labours*, and in great Measure from the *distracting Cares*, of this World: We are at full Liberty, nay by peculiar Encouragements *invited*, to ^a *seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness*; whilst not only by His General Promise, but by special Provisions for the same Purpose, *all These Things are added unto us*. — But farther;

Even those of our Studies here, which may seem to have no *direct* Tendency to *form* in us a Religious Principle, are however of great Use, if rightly improved, in supporting and *cherishing* it. When we turn the Eye of the Understanding inward upon itself, the Divinity *meets us in every Thought*, and calls upon Us to adore that Goodness, by which our *Minds* as well as our *Bodies* ^a *are fearfully and wonderfully made*. If we look abroad, ^b *the Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth His Handy-Work*. Throughout all our Researches into Nature, We trace the Footsteps of stupendous Wisdom and Majesty, obliging Us to cry out with the *Psalmist*, ^c *O LORD, how glorious are Thy Works!*

^a Matt. VI. 33.^b Psal. XIX. 1.^c Ibid. XCII. 5, 6.*Thy*

Thy Thoughts are very deep! And, shou'd any among us be so *brutish* as not to *consider this*; yet the stated Returns of our *Morning and Evening Sacrifice*, and the Laws by which You *compell them to come in* to the more immediate Presence of their Creator and Preserver, their Redeemer and Sanctifier, can hardly fail of striking the Minds of the most Unthinking, with some Degree of Awe and Veneration for that tremendous Being, who ^a *is very greatly to be feared in the Council of the Saints, and to be had in Reverence of all them that are round about Him.*

Let me add, in Justice to these Institutions, that, lest our Devotion shou'd degenerate into *Superstition*, or be over-heated into *Enthusiasm*, *sound Learning* is here taught to go hand-in-hand with *unaffected Piety*. Our Devotion, not *spoil'd by vain Philosophy*, is here regulated by sober Reason, and adorned by a due Application to every Branch of useful Knowledge. Our Holy Religion is indeed ^b *all glorious within*: But She never appears with more Gracefulness or Dignity, than when the *Sciences* are (as it is here best provided that they always shall be) ^c *the Virgins that be her Fellows, and that bear Her Company.*

^a Psal LXXXIX. 7.

^b Ibid. XLV. 13.

^c Ibid. 14.

What remains then, but that *having these great and precious Privileges*, (with which many others might be mention'd) We shou'd improve them to the Purposes for which they are given us, *perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God*. — We expect, many of us (I suppose) shortly to be call'd forth, from these Retirements, into a World, where we shall be sure to meet with a great Variety of *Temptations and Tryals*: And I need not now observe to You, how much will probably depend upon the *Preparation at first* made for this most interesting *Conflict*. Let us then lay hold on the Opportunity we *here* enjoy, for ^a *taking to us the Whole Armour of God, that we may be able to stand in the Evil Day, and having done all to stand*.

Upon the Whole, then, and to conclude — The Principle, which I have all along been inculcating and recommending, by explaining its Nature and illustrating its Usefulness, is that of an awful and affectionate Regard to the Law and Authority of Almighty God. And that this important Principle may *have its perfect Work* upon every one of us, let us always bear in Mind, that We are *every Moment* under the Inspection of God's *All-seeing Eye*: That ^b *there is not a Word in our Tongue,*

^a Eph. VI. 13.^b Psal. XVI. 8.

but He knoweth it altogether; not a Thought within our Breast, but He understandeth it long before: That as He at present marks all our Steps, so He will hereafter call us to an impartial Account, and assign Us our Portion of Everlasting Happiness or Endless Torment according to the Righteous Judgment which shall then be pass'd upon them. — These Truths let us remember, not in general only and historically, as Positions to which we yield a merely speculative Assent, and which we can upon Occasion demonstrate to others; but let us bring them Home to our Hearts and Consciences, as Truths of the most serious Concern, of the last Importance to us. — If thus, like Holy David, We ^aset God always before Us, like Him too, We shall not be moved. The Apprehension of God's Presence shall be the Guard of our Innocence and the Support of our Steps here; 'till the Enjoyment of His Presence shall be our Exceeding great Reward for evermore hereafter.

a Psal. XVI. 8.

S E R M O N II.

I TIM. IV. 8, 9, 10, 11.

—Godliness is profitable *unto all Things* having Promise of the Life that Now is, and of That which is to come.

This is a faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation:

For therefore we both Labour and suffer Reproach, Because we Trust in the Living GOD, who is the Saviour of all Men, specially of Those that Believe.

These Things Command and Teach.

THERE has no Argument more frequently, or hitherto more successfully, been made Use of by the Advocates for Christianity, in Proof of Its great Excellence and Usefulness to Mankind, than the *Powerfulness and Efficacy of*
Its

Its Motives to Goodness. The Argument is indeed *such* as the Enemies of Revealed Religion have generally thought it prudent to touch upon with Caution and Reserve. They cou'd argue with much seeming Subtility against some of Its *Doctrines*, and declaim plausibly against some of Its *Precepts*. But as to Its *Promises*, They cou'd no more find any Thing to object against These, than They cou'd produce any Thing *worthy to be compared* with them.

But we must not boast the *undisturb'd* Possession even of *This* Argument. If we will believe some late Writers, *Rewards* are, in their *Nature*, so far from being calculated to advance the *real* Interests of Moral Virtue, that They do, in Proportion to their Influence, destroy every Thing that is valuable in it: The obvious Consequence of which is, That the Greatness of such their Influence shou'd rather be consider'd as an Argument against, than a Proof of, the Excellence of any Scheme of Morality which lays much Stress upon them. — A late noble Author^a is well known to be every where *full* of Refinements of This Kind. Sometimes we find him expressing his Fears, ^b *lest the tender Nurses of Virtue shou'd overlay and kill it by Excess of Care and Che-*

^a Lord Shaftesbury in his *Characteristicks*. ^b Vol. I. pag. 97.
rishing.

rishing. And, lest we should either mistake, or not attend to, his Meaning, he tells us soon after, ^a *That some Writers in Morals have made Virtue so mercenary a Thing, and have talked so much of Its Rewards, that one can hardly tell what They have left in it, which can be worth Rewarding*. At other Times ^b he seems apprehensive, lest This Religious Discipline (as he expresses himself) of working upon Men's Hopes and Their Fears by Rewards or Punishments, *should introduce a certain Narrowness of Spirit, inconsistent with the Habit of Virtue, of which* (according to Him) *some better Affection* ^c *ought alone to be the sufficient Cause*. — And (to name no more) a yet later Writer ^d does more than insinuate, *That to do a Thing in Hopes of being rewarded for it Hereafter is to act upon a servile Principle, and such an one as comes far short of his Favourite one of Regard to* (what he calls) *the Original Obligation of the Moral Fitness of Things*.

What Purposes are *intended* to be serv'd by all This Clamour against a *mercenary Principle* (as These Persons are pleas'd to call every View to *private Happiness*) at least, what Pur-

^a Vol. 1. pag. 97. ^b Id. Vol. 2. pag. 58. ^c Id. Ibid. lin. 5, 6. ^d Auth. of Christianity as old &c. 4to. p. 367. 8vo. p. 332.

poses it has a natural *Tendency* to serve, is not hard to say. 'Tis agreed on all Hands, that the Writings, which we have hitherto revered as *Divine*, do every where *suppose* such a Principle in Man, and address themselves to it, in their Exhortations to Goodness. Promises and Threatenings make as great a Part of the Writings of *Moses* and *the Prophets* as Commands and Prohibitions: And if *Jesus* is ** the Mediator of a better Covenant*, yet we have it assign'd as one great Article of its superior Excellence, that it is *establiſh'd upon better Promises*. The Words of my Text furnish Us with a most remarkable Instance to the present Purpose. *St. Paul* is here exhorting *Timothy*, or rather (as seems more probable) setting *b him* a Pattern for *his* Exhortations of *others*, to the Practice of Virtue and Godliness. And he not only *himself* makes Use of That very Inducement drawn from Its extensive Profitableness with which the Persons above hinted at seem so much offended, but asserts in so many Words, that 'tis *a faithful Saying and worthy of all Acceptation*. Not satisfy'd with This, he condescends to explain the Springs and Motives of his own Conduct and of That of the first Christian Heroes, declaring that *Therefore* [*Εἰς τὸν*, for this very

* Heb. VIII. 6.

b 1 Tim. IV. 7.

End] *they both labour'd and suffer'd Reproach*, were content to forego Their present Ease, and to expose themselves to Scorn and Censure in the World, *Because they Trusted in the Living God*, and firmly relied on His Promises of Salvation to all His faithful Servants. Nay lastly, he directs *Timothy*, and, in him, all succeeding Preachers of the Gospel, to *Command and Teach these Things*, to be frequent and urgent upon This Argument in their publick Exhortations.

The Question before Us then, concerning the Propriety of recommending Virtue from the Advantages annex'd to it, when consider'd in This View, becomes a Question of some Importance and such as the Honour of Revealed Religion in General, and the regular Discharge of one great Branch of our Duty as Ministers of the Gospel, are very nearly concern'd in. If Virtue *may properly* be recommended, and especially if it can be made appear that It *actually needs* to be recommended, This Way; *the great and precious Promises* made to it in the Gospel may still be insisted on by Us both as powerful Incitements to Virtue, and as convincing Proofs of the Excellence and Importance of That Gospel which has made so noble a Provision for it. But if the Case should prove otherwise, it must be

own'd, *our Preaching of These Promises is vain and the Faith of our Hearers will, at least in This Respect, be also vain: Yea and we are found false Reasoners for the Gospel-Dispensation; because we have been us'd to insist on the Greatness of Its Rewards as a Proof of its Excellence, which is really no Proof of it, if the Influence of Rewards be indeed unfavourable to the Interests of real Virtue.*

I shall therefore in my following Discourse attempt a *Vindication of the Scripture Motives to Goodness*; and shall endeavour by Considerations drawn from Experience and the Nature of Things,

- I. *First*, To shew, that Virtue is *capable* of being promoted by Rewards.
- II. *Secondly*, To prove, that Virtue actually *needs* to be *Thus* promoted; and that Rewards are not only *proper* but *necessary* Incitements to the Practice of It.
- III. *Thirdly*, To examine and obviate some of the most usual *Exceptions* against the foremention'd Inducements to Virtue. And,
- IV. *Fourthly and Lastly*, To draw some useful *Inferences* from the foregoing Considerations.

I. *First*

I. *First* then, I am to shew that Virtue is *capable* of being promoted by Rewards.

I would only just observe by the Way, that in speaking of the Influence of Rewards for the promoting of Virtue, I would be understood not as excluding the Influence of the Grace of God, but as presupposing it. To This We Christians are taught to consider all Moral Inducements as only subordinate; and as Preachers of the Gospel we should always remember, that tho' ^a one *may plant and another water*, yet 'tis GOD *that must give the Increase*. However, Considerations of This Kind, cannot perhaps so properly be insisted on in a Dispute with the Enemies of Revealed Religion. To these we must be contented to shew, since They have thought fit to question it, that a Prospect of Rewards may be a proper and successful Incitement to Virtue. — To proceed then.

Virtue is sometimes understood to denote the *outward Acts*, sometimes the *inward Habit* of Goodness: Or, in other Words, sometimes it stands for the *Conformity* of our *Actions* to a given Rule, sometimes for That *internal Principle*, or Frame of Mind, from which such Conformity always *should*, tho' in

^a 1 Cor. III. 7.

Fa^ct it *do not* always, ^a proceed. Now, that Virtue in the former Sense of the Word, and as it denotes the mere Regularity of our Actions, may be promoted by either shewing that such Regularity will be Profitable, or by actually making it so; That is, That Men may be induced to observe good Rules, and to perform good Actions by being made to believe They shall be rewarded and become happier for so doing; This is a Point which the greatest Refiners will, I suppose, hardly think fit to dispute with Us.

To cut off all needless Multiplication of Words then, let it be supposed, that by Virtue in the present Enquiry is meant the *inward Principle* and not only the *outward Acts* of Goodness. And the Question, thus stated, will come to This,—“Whether That *inward Principle* from whence Virtuous Actions ought to flow, and for which Men are *properly Virtuous* and morally deserving, may be promoted by annexing Rewards to the Practice of Virtue.” Or in other Words, “Whether *Men* may become more *Virtuous* and in a *moral* Sense *more deserving* from an Expectation of Rewards, than They would be, had They no such Prospect.” Now

^a See 1 Cor. XIII. 3,

“That Men may be induc’d to conform
“their Actions to any given Rules by a Pros-
“pect of Rewards, and particularly to the
“Rules of Virtue and Religion, if Rewards
“be shewn to lye That Way;” I have already
presumed upon our Adversaries’ Leave to take
for granted. And, in return, We are, on our
Part, as willing to allow as They can be, that
mere outward Acts of Goodness do not of
Themselves *constitute* Men *really Virtuous* and
morally Good Beings. Yet perhaps it will be
found, that the Securing even of *These* may
be no inconsiderable Point gain’d, no small
Advance made towards *real* and *internal Good-*
ness.

After all our Refinements, while the Soul
and Body of Man continue to be so intimate-
ly united as They are, a constant Course of
Acting will *very considerably*, tho’ perhaps *al-*
most imperceptibly, influence the internal Frame
of Mind. From a *continued Observance* of a
Rule we acquire a *Facility*, and from *That*
again a *Pleasure*, in Observing of it; which
Pleasure naturally terminates in a *Love* of the
Rule itself. Supposing then, that a Prospect
of Rewards were capable, in its *immediate Ef-*
fect, of influencing the *outward Behaviour on-*
ly; yet ’tis reasonable to expect, It should,
in

in its more *remote Consequence*, extend its Influence to the *internal Principle* also.

Especially if we suppose farther That Virtue is agreeable to the Nature of Man: A Supposition, which the Persons we are contending with *at least*, cannot *consistently* deny. For let them place Virtue and Moral-Goodness upon what Foundation They please: Yet if what They tell us of the *Native Charms* of Virtue be true, *That* Virtuous and Good Principle, be it what it will, which we are considering, must be allow'd *agreeable* to the *Nature* of That Being, to whom (as They tell us) it is thus *amiable*. Without enquiring then what Those Impediments are, which hinder our Nature from *having her perfect Work*, and Virtue being constantly embrac'd; if such Motives are apply'd to our Minds as are powerful enough to break the Force of Those Impediments, and to engage Us in the *Practice* of Virtue, (which is the Case *now* suppos'd,) 'tis plain, our internal as well as external Powers are left at *Liberty* to pursue their *Natural Tendency*; our Affections are *permitted*, nay *invited* to embrace their proper Objects: And, what *can* the Result be, but that Virtue should be *to Us*, what It is allow'd to be *in Its own Nature*, altogether lovely?

We

We need not however rest *here*. Rewards, I doubt not, may be found, capable of (in the Sense above-mentioned) producing, or at least promoting, a Virtuous Principle by a *direct* and *immediate* as well as by a *remote* and *consequential* Influence. Thus for Instance, If the Reward propos'd be the Eternal *Enjoyment* of Truth, Rectitude, and Holiness, Those who place Virtue in a *Love* of Truth, Rectitude, and Holiness, must allow that Virtue is capable of receiving Encouragement and Vigour *directly* from such a Prospect: — If Virtue be suppos'd to consist in, or to flow from, suitable and becoming Affections to the Divine Being; a Reward, the very *Expectation* of which is, in its Nature, an Exercise of the devoutest Affections, must be allow'd at least capable of promoting a Virtuous Frame of Mind. — If lastly, Virtue be suppos'd principally to consist in kind and Benevolent Affections; a Reward, if such can be assign'd, the united Prosecution of which tends naturally to, *endear* Men to each other, may well be allow'd to have an Influence very favourable to real Virtue.

I am not here framing imaginary Suppositions, or such as have no real Foundation. But as a distinct Illustration of the several Particulars just hinted at would carry me too far;

far; I must refer them to your own Thoughts: Which, I doubt not, are before-hand with me in applying the several Cases suggested, to the Rewards proposed in the Gospel.—I shall proceed therefore

II. *Secondly*, To prove, That Virtue actually *needs* to be recommended from its Profitableness or the Advantages attending it; and that Rewards are not only *proper* but *necessary* Incitements to It.

We are apt sometimes to talk of Virtue as of some *exalted Personage*, and, in our Language, to bestow a Kind of *Divinity* upon it; and, when we have done This, 'tis no wonder we are led to ascribe to our imaginary Deity such Degrees of Perfection and Self-Sufficiency as Experience will by no Means justify Us in. But if we would, *to any good Purpose*, enquire what is really necessary for the Maintenance and Promotion of Virtue, we must consider Virtue, not *abstractedly* and *in Idea*, but *as it subsists in such Creatures as Men*. When therefore it is asserted, That Virtue *actually needs to be promoted by Rewards*, the Meaning is plainly This, That *Men*, before They will engage heartily in, and adhere steadily to, the Cause of Virtue, *do really need* to be satisfy'd they shall be *rewarded* for so Doing.

Doing. The Question thus stated may be brought to a short Issue, by considering the *Nature* of Man, and his *Circumstances* with Regard to Things about him.

As to Man's *Nature*, Without attempting any minute and particular Enumeration of the Faculties of the Soul, it may be sufficient to observe (what, I suppose, will hardly be deny'd) that *Passion* or *Affection* enters into our Constitution as well as *Intelligence* or *Reason*. And whatever *Preeminence* may be allow'd to Reason (as, no Doubt, much *ought to be* allow'd) yet we find in *particular* Cases, without something of Passion the Determinations of Reason would but very rarely produce any considerable Effects. *Desire, Hope, Fear, &c.* are the great *Springs* of Human Action, without which our other Powers would move but *heavily*. That This is the Case, daily Experience sufficiently testifies; and Arguments *against* Experience are only to be *answer'd* by fresh Appeals to It.

If it should be ask'd; "Whether Man
"would not be more perfect, had he no Oc-
"casion for his Passions; and were Reason
"sufficient at all Times not only to direct and
"determine his Choice, but to secure a pro-
"per Execution?"—The Question is idle and
impertinent at least, if not impious. God
has

has made Us with Affections as well as with Understanding : And 'tis *Our* Business to make a *right Use* of his Gifts, not to *quarrel with* them, i. e. with Him for Giving them. But more directly I answer, We might perhaps be more *Perfect Beings* were we *actuated* as well as *inform'd* by *pure Reason* ; but we should not be more *Perfect Men*. Reason without Affection is the Perfection of *Angels*, or rather indeed of *God only*. The Perfection of Man (as of Every other Being) consists in the *due Disposition* and *regular Exercise* of *All* Those Faculties which are properly Natural to him : Not in the *Inactivity*, and much less in the *Extirpation* of any.

The Result then is This : Man is a Being of a *mixt* Nature ; and in Order to gain his Attention to, and secure his Concurrence with, any Proposal of Importance, Application must be made to *each Part* of him. Now, whatever be determin'd concerning the precise and proper Object of Reason, It must be allow'd that *Happiness* is the Object of the Affections. Tho' therefore we may convince the *Understanding* by illustrating the *Rectitude* of any Undertaking ; yet by a Prospect of some *Advantage* we must *excite* the Affections. And *Both* must be done at least Generally speaking, if we would succeed in our Exhortations and engage the *Man*. What

What is here observ'd holds true upon the most *abstracted* Consideration of the Nature of Man; even supposing each of his Powers to maintain its proper Province, and the just Balance to be preserv'd between them. Happiness (we see) is as necessary to *engage* the Affections as Reason is to *conduct* them. And accordingly (I may observe before a Christian Audience) This was the Method in which God *Himself* thought fit to apply to our common Parent for Obedience even in Paradise. ^a *Of every Tree of the Garden Thou mayest freely eat; but of the Tree of Knowledge of good and Evil Thou shalt not eat of it.* Here is Man's Duty declared to Him. But did his Maker leave it Thus to his Understanding and Reason without any Enforcement? Quite otherwise. How then did infinite Wisdom think fit to enforce it? Why, not by insisting *only* or (as far as appears) *at all*, upon the Fitness of the Injunction itself, or even upon the Reasonableness of *Adam's* acting agreeably to the Relation He stood in to His great Creator and Benefactor. These Considerations, how proper soever, were not such as His Obedience even then was to be wholly entrusted with: His Affections were to be apply'd to, and particularly His Fears to be a-

^a Gen. II. 16, 17.

waken'd : And accordingly We find the fore-mention'd Declaration of His Duty seconded with this solemn Denunciation, — *In the Day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely dye.*

However, if we take a View of Man's Nature as we now find it, (a View against which no Exception can be taken, either by the *avow'd Unbeliever* on one Hand, or the *Allegorical Interpreter* on the other) our Argument will receive still farther Enforcement. The Necessity of Rewards will rise in Proportion to the visible Degeneracy of our Nature. Be *Virtue* never so *Reasonable*, never so *Amiable*, yet if *our Understandings* are obscur'd and *our Wills* perverted : If our Reasoning Faculties are weak and inattentive, and our Passions at once irregular and strong ; all *Its Charms* will be lost upon us. Some Additional Motives are in This State of Things manifestly necessary ; not only to give a proper *Activity* and *Direction* to our *disengag'd Affections*, but to *counteract* the perverse *Tendency* of our *depraved* ones : To *awaken our Attention*, to *assist our Reason*, and (as it were) to *bribe our Wills* into a right, but otherwise *unpleasing*, Choice.

How exalted soever our Notions of Human Nature may be, yet if we will be content to take This Nature *as it subsists in Individuals*,

we

we shall find that Virtue, notwithstanding Its Congruity to *Reason*, is by no Means generally agreeable to *Inclination*. Indisposition at least, if not Aversion, to Goodness is what the sober Part of Mankind have in all Ages complain'd of, and what the Best of Men have ever experienc'd, at least, at their first Entrance on the Paths of Virtue. And whatever may be thought of That *Moral-Sense*, which has of late been contended for; 'tis certain, Men have *other Senses* besides *That*, and Those generally far more importunate for Their respective Gratifications. Whoever seriously reflects on what passes within him, will not want the Authority of Revelation to convince him, that there is "a *Law in our Members, warring against the Law of our Mind*. And 'tis well if by all the Promises, or even all the Threats of the Gospel, we can prevent its *bringing Men into Captivity to the Law of Sin*. — But farther:

'Tis not to be dissembled, that one great Part of Mankind will generally be found *engaged* in an Interest opposite to That of Virtue. And how shall we go about to recommend It to Persons of *This* Character? From Its Native Charms? From Its *Fitness* or Its *Reasonableness*? Alas! *Such* Recommendations will naturally be look'd upon as *idle Tales* by

These Persons. They will turn a deaf Ear to all we can say on This Argument: Or, if out of *Curiosity* They vouchsafe us the Hearing, They will probably entertain us with Scorn and Mockery, as *Bablers* or Enthusiasts. The most serious of Them will tell us, “We all along *Beg the Question*: They *like* the Way “They are in; and are far from Envyng us “Those refin’d Gratifications we so much “boast of.” In Truth, *Self-Love* is the most prevailing, if not the only Universal, Principle of Human Action. Where *This* can be wrought upon in our Recommendations of Virtue, some Good *may* be done. But our Exhortations will have no Hold on the Generality of Persons, unless we can outbid their present Schemes, and convince them that Godliness either *is* with Regard to the Success of *These*, or with Regard to some more important Interest hereafter *will be, great Gain*.

Add to all This, that Cases may well be suppos’d, because such have frequently in Fact happen’d, wherein a steady Adherence to the Cause of Virtue shall not only oblige us to quit some present Advantage but to submit to some present Inconvenience, and perhaps Misery. Now some *Counterbalance* should be provided against Evils of This Kind. The ab-

tract *Beauty* and *Fitness* of Virtue will be *very* insufficient for This Purpose. Men are not generally *Stoicks* either in Practice or Opinion. Nor is it fit they should be so. Pain and Loss will still be counted *real* Evils by the *sensible* Part of Mankind: And to tell a Man, in deep Distress for his Attachment to the Interests of Virtue, That *She* is *Her own Reward*, would justly be thought a very *unfriendly* Method of *Consolation*. — In Fact, the Fitness and Amiability of Virtue will never, while Men are Men, be Proof against Those Difficulties, to which a constant Adherence to It will sometimes expose Them: Nor can any Provision be made against Exigencies of This Kind, which can *rationaly* be deem'd sufficient, unless some Advantages be either given in Hand, or ensur'd in Reversion, to the Adherents to Virtue, which may be at least an Equivalent for the Advantages They are obliged to *forego*, or a Recompence for the Evils They are obliged to *suffer*, *in* and *for* Their Adherence to It.

After what has been already advanced, it will now be less difficult,

III. *Thirdly*, To obviate some of the usual *Pleas* against the above-mention'd Inducements to Goodness.

Now these may, I believe, be reduced to the following Particulars. Either the *Natural Supremacy of Reason* : — Or the *Amiability and Charms of Virtue and Benevolence* : — Or *some Suppos'd Inconsistence between a Selfish Principle and the Excellency of Moral Goodness*. To each of These therefore I shall speak as *distinctly*, and at the same as *briefly*, as I can. — It may be said then

1. “Is not *Reason* the *Governing Faculty* “in the *Constitution of Man*? Must it not “therefore be, *in all Circumstances*, *right* and “*proper* for Man to be *Govern'd by Reason*? “And must not whatever appears agreeable “to Reason be on that very Account to him “*Eligible*?” — I see not why the Affirmative rightly understood may not be admitted, without Prejudice to our Cause. Let every Action, that shall be found agreeable to Reason be allow'd never so eligible and even obligatory: Yet in all Enquiries concerning the Agreeableness of *particular Actions* to Reason, the *Circumstances* of the *Agent* must be taken into the Account, if not principally regarded. But now it must be Impossible that any Action should appear Reasonable to a *particular Agent* which is not either *Conducive* to, or at least *Consistent with*, his *Final Happiness*. Reason and Happiness may in *Appearance* and for a
Time,

Time, but can never *absolutely* and *Finally*, interfere. To choose present Pain and Misery for the sake of an Overbalance of Pleasure and Happiness in Reversion, may often be Reasonable. But to choose Pain and Misery without any such Prospect, would be to choose Evil *as such*: And Evil *as such* can, in no imaginable Circumstances, be the Object of a *Rational* Choice. — In short, *Reason* is Man's *Guide*, But *Happiness* is at least one great *End* to which It is appointed to *conduct* him.

2. As to the *Amiableness* and *Charms* of Virtue, I would hope, much need not *here* be added. In Fact, The *Amiableness* of Virtue can only, in any *sober* Sense, be admitted, supposing Either — That 'tis *always found consistent with Happiness*; or — That 'tis *approved* by a Being who *can* and *will Finally make It* so. On This latter Supposition, Virtue will be *indeed* Amiable; I add, in all *possible* Circumstances: Because when once we know what is approved by God, we may, in *all* Circumstances, *trust Him* with the Consequences of our acting accordingly. But, could we take away the Supposition of a *Deity* or (which amounts to the same Thing) of a *Rewarder*, the Case would be much alter'd: And whatever would become of the *Amiableness* of Virtue, It would certainly be found

not *Self-sufficient*. — This Account does not indeed ascribe to Virtue such mighty Things as some Persons would be thought to ascribe to It: But will however be found most effectually to secure Its *Credit* and *true Interests*. And one would think it should not long be a Question, “Who are the *truest Friends* to Virtue?” They who pay it many Fine Compliments, which may suit Its Condition tolerably well in the Day of Prosperity, whilst in the Article of Distress they leave It *naked* and *defenceless*? or they who provide It, against *all Casualties* and in *all Circumstances*, with a sufficient Subsistence and Support?

And then, as to the *Benevolent Affections*: — Without entering into the Dispute concerning *Their Origin*: If, for the Present, we allow them to be as *Natural* and as *Universal* as has been contended for: Yet surely the Exercise of *These*, as of all other Affections, should be guided by *Reason* and a *Regard to Circumstances*. Now the farthest we can *rationaly* go in Favour of Benevolence, without a *Divine Command*, seems to be *This*. We *feel* within ourselves, that Happiness is greatly preferable to Misery; and we cannot doubt but that our Fellow-Creatures are affected in the *same Manner*; which Consideration will always be a sufficient *Reason* for our Endeavouring

vouring to communicate Happiness to others and to avert Misery from them, where no *stronger Reason* appears to the Contrary: And what *Reason* Thus dictates, *natural Affection* will I hope in general strongly enforce and greatly facilitate, the Execution of. But certainly the Care of a Man's *own final* Happiness, (and, without supposing a *Deity*, every Moment's Happiness *may* be so) must *to him* be the strongest Reason, and such as, in Case of Interference, all Endeavours for promoting the Happiness of others will, *in Course*, give Way to. *Love of Ourselves* is in Scripture made the Measure and Standard of our ^a *Love of our Neighbour*; and the Precept, when rightly understood, is perfectly agreeable to the justest Reason. But neither Reason nor Revelation *ever* require, that the Former should be *exceeded* by the Latter, and much less *destroy'd* by it. — If it should be still ask'd,

3. “Is it not of the Nature of Virtue to be “*disinterested*? or however, Do not Views of “private Advantage in Proportion to Their “Influence, detract from the *Excellency* of “Virtue and Moral Goodness?” — I answer (as before) If by Disinterestedness be meant no more than Freedom from a *sordid* Attach-

^a Matt. XXII. 39.

ment to the *low* Interests of *This Life*, and by private Views, Views of *Temporal* Gain or Grandeur: 'Tis very readily allow'd that the more disinterested any Moral Agent is, that is, the less he is influenced by Views of *This Kind*, his Character is more amiable, and his Performance more honourable. Nay 'tis allow'd farther, that such a Principle *may*, in Proportion to its Influence, lessen the Excellency and impair the Habit of Virtue: Tho' at the same Time, 'tis unreasonable to expect, and absurd to imagine, that Disinterestedness, even in *This* Sense, should be *necessary* to the *Being* of Virtue; or that *Human Virtue*, while subsisting in *This World*, should be *wholly* abstracted from *all* Concern for the Conveniencies and Advantages of it. — But if by Disinterestedness be meant Disregard to our own Interest *finally* and *upon the Whole*; This is a Frame of Mind wholly unaccountable on *any known* Principles of human Nature: And we can only say, — Either, that Disinterestedness in *This* Sense is not of the *Essence* of Virtue, Or, that *Virtue was not made for Man*.

The Truth is, the Interest propos'd to good Men in the Gospel is such an Interest as we *may* most safely, nay, if we will be just to ourselves, we *must*, pursue. *An exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory* may well be allow'd
to

to have *some* Influence, indeed cannot have *too great* an Influence, on our Thoughts and Actions. To make an Object infinitely valuable the Object of our Pursuits, must certainly be agreeable to the *Reasons* and *Fitnesses* of *Things*, if there *be* any such in Nature. And, if This must be call'd *Selfishness*, we must insist upon it, that there is an allowable, a commendable, a *Virtuous* Selfishness.

4. "But does not God, the most perfect
 "Pattern of Rectitude and Goodness, and
 "whose Excellencies it is our Duty and Per-
 "fection to *imitate*, conduct all His Actions
 "by an *intirely disinterested* Adherence to *Rea-
 "son* and *Truth*?" Undoubtedly He does.
 And to endeavour to *imitate* Him in *Things*
not without our Measure, is an Aim worthy
 of a Creature *made in the Image of God*. But
 then our Ambition, to make it commendable,
 or even excusable, must be *suit*ed to our *Cir-
 cumstances*. They who argue from the disin-
 terested Nature of God's Goodness for a like
 Disinterestedness in our's, seem to forget, *That*
God is in Heaven and we upon Earth. God
 is a Being *independent* and *self-sufficient*: His
 Happiness is *incapable* of either Increase or
 Diminution. In Him therefore *Freedom from*
Concern for the Preservation or Advancement
 of Happiness, i. e. *Disinterestedness*, is a Per-
 fection

fection resulting from the peculiar Condition of His Nature : And I cannot help thinking it a blameable Presumption, instead of a commendable Emulation, to make the peculiar Condition of *Divine Perfection* a Measure and Standard for *Human Virtue*.

After all ; Thus much *may*, I think, and indeed *must*, be admitted, That wise and good Men do really perform many Virtuous, many Benevolent Actions, without either staying to *reconcile* such Actions to their *present* Interest, or *actually* setting before their Eyes any *Future* Reward. And the Consciousness of such Performances may have been the Occasion, why *some such* Persons seem to have thought too favourably of the Notion of an *intirely disinterested Virtue*. Whereas the Case above-suppos'd, if rightly consider'd, is so far from being an Argument against the Usefulness or Necessity of the Gospel-Motives, that 'tis Itself an eminent Instance of the Glorious Influence of Them.—The Expectation of a Reward, inestimable in Its Value and endless in Its Duration, where It has taken Possession of the Soul, especially where by a happy Education It has grown up with Us from our Infancy, becomes a fixt Principle of Action and influences our Conduct in numberless Instances when It is least *attended* to by Us. Secure,

cure, *habitually* and *in general* secure, of our *Final* Interests, we are at Liberty to follow the Guidance of Right Reason whithersoever It leads us; and our *Private* Affections being so *certainly*, and at the same Time so *amply*, provided for, we have more Leisure and more Inclination to hearken to the Solicitations of our *social* Affections in Favour of our Fellow-Creatures. But, were we in perpetual Uncertainties as to our *Final* State, especially ^a *had we no Hope and were we without God in the World!* what would become of Virtue or Benevolence, is not hard to say! — In short, To engage and support Mankind in the Cause of Virtue, the *actual Prospect* of a *Recompence of Reward* is generally, and the *habitual Belief* of It is *always* necessary. And even Those Actions which we flatter ourselves are most generous and most disinterested, must, to make them Rational, at least *presuppose* if they do not *directly proceed from*, the powerful tho' *unheeded* Influence of That *Hope*, which need not ^b *make us ashamed*.

Upon the Whole; I hope it appears, of how little Weight the Common Exceptions against the Scripture-Inducements to Goodness really are. They are manifestly founded on a Chimerical Supposition of Man's being in a much

^a Eph. II. 12.

^b Rom. V. 5.

more Perfect State than he appears in Fact to be : And so in Reality amount to just Thus much, “ *That were Man a Being more perfect than he is, Rewards would be less needful to induce him to the Performance of his Duty.*”

A Proposition which, I presume, will not be thought to have *much* Weight against what has been offer’d. — We may therefore now proceed

IV. *Fourthly and Lastly*, To draw some useful *Inferences* from what has occur’d in the Consideration of the foregoing Heads. — And

1st From what has been observ’d we may collect, What Foundation is best fitted to support an *uniformly practicable* Morality.

The *Natures and Relations of Things* may be a good *Rule of Action as far as They go* ; where They are clearly *perceiv’d* and duly *attended* to. And They become properly a *Law* to Us when consider’d as the Result of the *Divine* Appointment in the Constitution of Things. But without such Appointment let us ascribe to them what *Binding* Force we please, ’tis but too visible, They would of *Themselves*, be able to secure but an inconsiderable Number of Observers. Nothing can, *in Fact*, secure the *General* Observance of any Rule,

Rule, but what is able to secure *Happiness*, *immediate* or *Final Happiness*, to the *particular* Observers. But who will say This can be done by the Natures or Finesses of Things, unless we place *a Deity at the Head of Them*? 'Tis certain GOD, and He *only*, can secure the Happiness of His Creatures against *all Casualties*: And therefore, *a View to His Approbation* must be the only secure Foundation for a *Fixed Morality*, and such as shall be in all Circumstances *Reasonable* or *Practicable*.^a *Other Foundations* indeed *Men may lay, besides That which is Thus laid*; and, while all is calm and serene, may please Themselves with the *specious Superstructure*. But let *Storms* and *Tempests arise*, and ^b *every Man's Work* will soon be made manifest: *For the Day of Adversity shall declare every Man's Work, of what Sort it is.*

2^{ly} After what has been said, We may *Now venture* to infer the great Excellency and superior Advantages of the Gospel-Revelation with Regard to Morality.

The Enemies of Reveal'd Religion have, it must be own'd, acted a pretty *consistent* Part, in decrying the Usefulness of Rewards for the Support and Promotion of Virtue, and in depreciating Those Good Actions which proceed

^a 1 Cor. III. 11.

^b Ibid. 13.

from a View to any Recompence. Deism has *no such* Rewards to offer as Christianity proposes: And therefore could Its Patrons persuade Us to forbear all Mention of Rewards, as of useless and improper Inducements to Goodness; could They prevail upon Us to set aside every Thing of This Kind as quite out of the Question; *Their* beloved Scheme (if They *really have any determinate* one) of Natural Religion, would indeed have *one* Obstacle fewer than it *now* has to its being able to *stand a Comparison* with the Morality of the Gospel. But we have no Occasion rashly to give up This Advantage. So long as Desire of Happiness is Man's *Prevailing* Principle, i. e. *so long as Human Nature continues*, the Rewards of the Gospel will furnish us with an unanswerable Proof of Its *Importance to Morality*. — The Heathen *Philosopher* may *argue*, and Their *Orator* *declaim* upon the *Dignity* of Man's Nature, the *Turpitude* of Vice, the *Honourableness*, *Pleasantness*, and *Reasonableness* of *Virtue*, &c. Considerations very *properly* urg'd in their *Place* and *Season*. But what are all These to the Good Christian's *Hope full of Immortality*? 'Tis *here* the Christian Revelation most *eminently displays* itself, in That it does not, like the Pagan Systems, after providing for the Happiness of *This* Life
and

and perhaps for a *short* Survival of an *empty Name*, leave Us *without any farther Prospects*; but secures to Us a Reversion of Happiness, compleat enough to *fill the Capacities*, and to *run commensurate* with the *Duration* of our *immortal Souls*. — Give me Leave

3^{ly} From what has been said to *suggest*, Which are the most proper Instruments of Persuasion in the Mouth of a *Christian Orator*.

The *Beauty* and *Amiability* of Virtue; Its *Agreeableness* with the *justest Reason*, and the *Resemblance* It gives Us to the *Divine Nature*, &c. are Arguments which, in *Conjunction with Its Rewards*, may be us'd with Good Success: And 'tis *Thus* we find them *sometimes* us'd, but *seldom otherwise*, in Holy Scripture itself. *Rational Arguments*, when seconded by *Gospel-Motives*, will *pierce deep* into the Soul, and *be as Nails fasten'd in a sure Place*: But without such Enforcement They rather *gratify the Ear* than *warm the Heart*; and are seldom found to *leave behind any lasting Impression*. While we entertain our Audience with *Harangues* of This Kind, the Man of Curiosity and Refinement will probably ^a *hear the Word with Attention*, and

^a Luk. VIII. 13.

anon with Joy receive it ; pleas'd to have his Duty so elegantly describ'd, and his own Nature, as well as That of Virtue, set in so agreeable a Light. But let us look into his Life, and we shall find the Progress by no means answerable to These promising Beginnings. The Reason is, ^a He has no Root in himself ; His Resolutions were not grounded in the only lasting Principle of his Nature ; His Vanity was soothed indeed, and his Curiosity gratify'd ; but his Desire of Happiness was not wrought upon. No wonder therefore if ^b he dureth only for a while, and in Time of Temptation falleth away.

Lastly, and to conclude. Since Godliness has such great and precious Promises as we find in the Gospel ; Let Us all Remember This and shew ourselves Men ; Let Us act as becomes Intelligent and Rational Beings, that profess to have such Glorious Prospects in View.

In vain will all our Disputes with the Deist be, in vain our Triumphs over him, upon the Powerfulness and Efficacy of the Gospel-Motives, if we cannot convince him of their superiour Power and Efficacy by our Lives and Conversations. In vain, I say, with Regard to the Deist ; but, with Regard to ourselves,

^a Luk. VIII. 13.

^b Ibid.

much worse. The Gospel has Its *Terrors* as well as Its *Promises*; and if the Latter do not invite, the Former will one Day overtake us. If the Rewards of the Gospel be not powerful *Motives with Us* now, They will hereafter become powerful *Arguments against Us*. — May our *Advances* in Goodness bear some Proportion to our boasted *Encouragements* to It! May We ^a *always abound in the Work of the LORD; forasmuch as We know that Our Labour is not in Vain in the LORD!*

a 1 Cor. XV. 58.

SERMON

S E R M O N I I I .

MATTHEW VI. 33.

*Seek Ye first the Kingdom of GOD, and
His Righteousness, and all these Things
shall be added unto You.*

AMONG the many gracious Evidences of *Good-Will to Men*, which display themselves in the Gospel-Revelation, *This* may deserve to be gratefully acknowledged; that It is calculated at the same Time to advance Its Professors to the highest Attainments in Goodness, and yet not to discountenance or neglect the lowest: Its Divine Author having in this as well as all other respects admirably adapted His Provisions to the various Exigencies of our present Condition: *Whereof He needed not that any one should testify or give Him an Account; for He knew what was in Man.*

Of This We have an eminent Instance in the *Motives* made Use of to engage His Disciples

ciples and earliest Followers, and with them succeeding Christians of all Ages, in the Practice of what is right. Such, in fact, is the Imperfection and Depravity of the human Race, that a large Proportion of them will always want to be made *Converts to Virtue and Godliness*: And of the rest, no small Number will generally be found to have made but very *little Proficiency* in either of them. And even Persons of an higher Class and of more exalted Views are *not always equally* affected with the distant Prospects of another World. Our Saviour therefore, in great Condescension to the Frailty of Mankind in general, is pleased, not only to ensure a glorious *Reversion* of Happiness, but to annex some *present* Encouragements, to the Performance of our Duty. After having declared, that *Great is our Reward in Heaven*, He might have insisted on our Obedience without entering into any farther Engagements with Us. But *He knows whereof We are made, and remembers* that we are most apt to be affected by what is *present* with Us: And therefore, tho' He requires Us, as most justly He may, to *Seek first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness*; yet He subjoins the encouraging Assurance, that *all needful Accommodations of this Life shall be added unto Us*.

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There is, we know, a Notion, which has been but too much countenanced, not only by the *Enemies* of our holy Religion, but by Some of Its indiscreet and visionary *Friends*; I mean, that a Regard to personal Interest, either here or hereafter, is by no means a proper Principle of Goodness in Man; — so far from that, as to destroy the Rewardableness of His otherwise best Performances. However, tho' it were easy to shew, in Opposition to the *Former*, that the very Nature and Circumstances of Man make it necessary, in order to engage him in the Practice of Virtue, that he should have some Prospect of being rewarded and made happier for it; and, in Opposition to the *Latter*, that the Sacred Writings every-where *suppose* such a Principle in Man, and address themselves to it in their Exhortations to Goodness: Yet my Design at present is to consider, not so much the Necessity of Rewards *in general* to recommend a Virtuous Conduct, as the particular Usefulness of the *Advantages* of *This* World and the *Prospects* of *the Next* as Motives to it, and the Influence which Each of These may be *allowed* to have upon our Minds and our Actions. Both of them are in holy Scripture proposed as Encouragements and Incitements to our Duty; and therefore, We may be sure,
that

that Both of them are in some Degree useful, and may be in some Degree regarded by Us, for that Purpose. But then, it greatly concerns Us to *proportion* our Regards to the real Dignity and Excellency of Each of them, and to allow to Each of them their *proper* Influence upon our Thoughts and Actions: Because it is not barely our outward Conduct, but the Views and Motives upon which that Conduct is formed, that must give Us our Denomination and true Character in the Estimation of a Judge; *“who seeth not as Man seeth; who looketh not on the outward Appearance, but who looketh on the Heart.*

That our Aims may, therefore, be upon the Whole so rightly directed, as to approve our Conduct, and *assure our Hearts before God*; and yet, that the Interests of Virtue and Piety may not be deprived of any proper Assistance whilst they really stand in Need of all the Assistance that can be given them; it may not be improper to consider a little more distinctly the *comparative Worth* and Excellency of the Two Kinds of Motives above hinted at; and to shew, that though Motives of this World may be usefully employed as *Supports* in our Christian Course, yet Motives of the next should always have the *principal* Place in

our Affections and Pursuits. — *Seek Ye first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, and all These Things shall be added unto You.*

By *the Kingdom of God*, I am aware, may be understood either His Kingdom of Grace here, or His Kingdom of Glory hereafter. But I shall take Leave to consider the Expression chiefly in This latter Sense; as, I conceive, it will best suit with our Blessed LORD's Reasoning in the Passage before Us. He had just been cautioning His Hearers against being too anxiously *thoughtful* about the Things of this Life, saying, "*What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed?*" For (saith He) *after all These Things do the Gentiles seek*: The unenlightened Heathen, having little or no Notion of any other Life, may have some Pretence for Solitude about the Accommodations of This: Nor is it to be wondered at, if They who consider the *present* State as the *only* State with which They have any Concern, are willing to *make the most* of it. But Your Case is very different: GOD, who careth for You here, *hath provided still better Things for You hereafter*: *Great is Your Reward in Heaven*. And, tho' You are not required to abandon *all* Regard for those Things, which Your heavenly Father knoweth Ye have Need of in this present State; yet

yet neither should You be anxiously solicitous about them. Better will it become *You*, to enlarge Your Views in proportion to the Extent of the Prospect now opened to You. Let *Your* Solicitude be placed upon the Object that is most worthy of it. Make the Happiness of Heaven, and the *Righteousness* that leads to It, Your *chief* Concern, and You may safely rely on the Providence of God for the needful Supply of the rest: *Seek Ye first the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness; and all these Things shall be added unto You.*

From the Words considered in this View I may not unfitly take Occasion to lay before You some useful Reflections upon the Rewards of *another* World and the Advantages of *This*, as *Motives* to Virtue and Godliness; — the *Efficacy* and *Dignity* of these two Kinds of Inducements *in themselves*: — And the *Degree*, in which We may allow ourselves to be influenced by the One or the Other of them, in the Discharge of our Duty. Only here desiring once for All, that what is said, of the Efficacy or *Influence* of the *Motives* under Consideration, may be understood, *not* as excluding the *Influences* of Divine Grace, but as *presupposing* them.

And *First*, Let us consider This Matter in Reference to Motives of *another* World; in

order to discover, what Efficacy These are fitted to have, and what Influence they may be allowed to have, on our Thoughts and Actions.

Now, besides *That* great Principle of *Self-Love*, or Regard to Personal Happiness, upon which Rewards of every Kind are calculated to operate; there are *Three* others (if indeed They are more than only *Modifications* of the Former) which the Moralists of the present Age have thought fit to espouse and recommend; Each contending warmly for his own peculiar Favourite, as if it were the only *proper*, or however the *most excellent*, Principle from which all really worthy Conduct must be derived. The Principles I mean may be denominated *Rectitude*, or a Regard to Truth and right Reason; *Piety*, or Regard to the Authority of our Creator and supreme Governour; and *Benevolence*, or Regard to the Benefit and Happiness of our Fellow-Creatures. But, without needlessly detaining You, or engaging myself, with any unseasonable Controversy between the various Writers upon this Subject; or without setting at *Variance* three Principles of human Action, which surely very well may and indeed ought to co-operate, or rather which (if rightly considered) will be found in fact to co-incide, with
each

each other; It will be sufficient to shew, (as may, I conceive, most easily be shewn) how the Rewards now under Consideration, have a Tendency to improve and strengthen *every one* of the Principles just above mentioned in the Mind of Man.

In the *First* Place, then; If a Regard to Reason, Truth and Righteousness be, as it may be allowed to be, *one* proper Principle of Virtue and good Conduct; what can more powerfully recommend and confirm this Principle, than the Prospect of a Reward (if *such* can be discovered) consisting in the Everlasting Enjoyment of all These? But now, Truth, Righteousness and Holiness are, we know, not only *necessary Preparatives* for, but *Essential Ingredients* in, the Happiness prepared for *the Saints in Light*. ^a *We know not* indeed distinctly and particularly *what we shall be*: But thus much we know, that the ^b *Heaven we wait for* is a Place *wherein dwelleth Righteousness*; that 'tis a Place of such Purity, that *no unclean Thing can enter it*; that *we shall* there see God, the Fountain of Truth, *as He is*; and that ^c *without Holiness no Man can see Him*. A Desire and Expectation of a Reward like this must imply ^d *an Hunger and Thirst*

a 1 Joh. III. 2.

b 2 Pet. III. 13.

c Heb. XII. 14.

d Matt. V. 6.

after that Righteousness and Truth which make so considerable a Part of it; a Desire of being set at a Distance from every Evil Thing; a Desire of pleasing God by Righteousness and enjoying Him in Holiness. And how, then, must such a Prospect animate the Endeavours of every Lover of Truth and Goodness! ^a He that has This Hope in him, how naturally must he be led, how forcibly constrained, to purify himself even as the Enjoyments he hopes to be blest with are pure!

Again: If a Regard to God's Authority and suitable Apprehensions of His glorious Attributes be (as most certainly They are) *proper Principles* of good Behaviour; the very Performance of Virtuous Actions upon a Prospect of the Rewards of another World both implies and exercises, and by that means improves and invigorates, every right Affection towards the *Supreme Being*. A Mind, prepared to carry us thro' an uniform Course of Virtue upon this Principle, must be not only *desirous* of Enjoying God's Presence, but *resign'd* to His Will, and securely *acquiescing* in His *Disposal*: It must be a Mind fully *satisfied* with the Promises of GOD; *willing to trust Him* with the Issues of one's Actions; and contented to *wait His Time* for the Re-

ward of them. Every Act of Obedience and Virtue perform'd upon such a Principle implies an humble *Acknowledgment* of, and confirms our dutiful *Reliance* upon, the *Goodness*, the *Veracity*, and the *Faithfulness* of GOD.— It is justly recorded as an illustrious Instance of the Patriarch *Abraham's* Trust in GOD, that ^a *when He was called to go out into a Place which He should after receive for an Inheritance, He obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither He went.* The like Acts of Faith and Affiance every good Christian exerts, who ^b *by patient and unwearied Continuance in Well-doing seeks for Glory and Immortality; with an humble Confidence that in due Time He shall reap, if he faint not.*

Once more: The Prosecution of those Rewards to which our Holy Religion invites us Christians, is so far from being destructive of that Virtue which is supposed to flow from *Benevolent Affections*, that it tends greatly to improve and exalt it. We are very apt to conceive of *private* and selfish Regards as inconsistent with Generosity and prejudicial to *Publick-Spirit*; and with relation to the Advantages of *this* World we find but too just Cause for such an Apprehension. These are of a *Nature so confined* that our Pretensions to

^a Heb. XI. 8.

^b Comp. Rom. II. 7. and Gal. VI. 9.

them

them must frequently *interfere*, and no Man's *Exclusion* be previously necessary to make Room for another's *Enjoyment*. Hence our *Competitions* but too naturally degenerate into *Quarrels*, and our *Self-Love* becomes unfriendly to our *Benevolence*. But in the Pursuit of the Rewards of *another World* there is *no Danger* of this Kind. Here we may all be *Competitors* without any *Interference* of our respective *Claims*: In ^a *this Race* we may all run, and each receive the Prize — Nay (I may add) such is the Nature of the Prize here proposed, that our *united* Pursuit of it has a natural Tendency to *endear* Us to each other. To reflect, that we are *all alike Strangers and Sojourners on this Earth*: That after a short Stay here we are to be transplanted to the *same* happy Country, where we are to ^b *cobabit for Ever*, as *Fellow-Citizens of the Saints*, and of the *Household of God* — what an Argument is this against *Falling out by the Way*! What a Persuasive to *Love and to Good Works*! Where, in all the Volumes of mere Philosophy, do we find so noble an Incitement to ^c *follow after Charity* as that of St. Paul assuring us, that it shall be our *Employment* and our *Happiness* for ever! that when ^d *Prophecies shall fail*

^a 1 Cor. IX. 24.
^d Ibid. XIII. 8.

^b Eph. II. 19.

^c 1 Cor. XIV. 1.

when

when *Tongues shall cease*, when (what we here call) *Knowledge shall vanish away*, *Charity never faileth*.

You see then, from these few imperfect Hints, how the Case stands with regard to the *Influence* of the Rewards of *another World* upon a *Virtuous Frame of Mind*: They are so far from being *inconsistent* with the Excellency of Virtue, that they appear *highly conducive* to its Promotion, and that too in its *most exalted Degrees*. We need therefore be under no Apprehension lest *the Kingdom of God* should be *too eagerly sought* by Us, or the Happiness of Heaven should have *too great an Influence* upon our Minds. — But as to the Influence of *Temporal Motives*, such as the Riches, the Honours, the Pleasures of this World, the Case is far otherwise. Inducements of this Kind come far short of Those we have hitherto been considering, in *every one* of the Particulars I have been illustrating. An Attachment to this World and its good Things is indeed in its natural Tendency very prejudicial to our *Love of Truth*, our *Benevolence* and above all to our *Piety*. Wheresoever therefore Views of worldly Advantage are made the *principal Motives*, the *ultimate End* of Action, they are very far from being a regular and *sufficient Principle* of Virtue, of that

Virtue

Virtue at least which can be properly call'd *Christian*; and ^a *except our Righteousness exceed This, We shall in no Case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.*

That we can have *no Claim* to any Reward, no reasonable Expectations of it, farther than we ourselves have perform'd the Conditions with *a View to That* Reward, is a Method of judging founded in Reason and Truth; and is expressly confirm'd by the Declaration of our LORD Himself. ^b *Take Heed (says He) that Ye do not Your Alms before Men to be seen of them: Otherwise Ye have no Reward of Your Father which is in Heaven:* And to make the deeper and more lasting Impression upon our Minds, He repeats the same Declaration, and applies it severally to Two other Duties, ^c *Prayer and Fasting.* It concerns us therefore to remember, that We have no Prospect of any Rewards *beyond* This Life, if our Obedience was perform'd purely out of Regard to such Advantages as are to be enjoy'd *in* it. If, for instance, we perform Acts of Charity and Beneficence *meerly* for the Sake of gaining a Reputation and making a Figure in the World; or again, if we observe the Rules of Temperance only in Order to recover or preserve a healthy Constitution of Body: We may in either Case

^a Matt. V. 20.

^b Ibid. VI. 1.

^c Ibid. 5, 16.

be called *Prudent*, but not *Godly*; and as a Reward of such Prudence, we may enjoy Health and Length of Days, or we may receive a plentiful Return of the Favour and Applause of Men like ourselves. But then — *We have our Reward*; the Reward we have *chosen*, and (as it were) *agreed for*; and *all* the Reward that we can hope to receive at our heavenly Father's Hands.

But it may be said, “Are *Temporal* Motives then, which are so often insisted on in “the inspired Writings, *of no Use* in promoting the *real* Interests of Virtue and Piety?” — This must by no means be affirm'd. For, besides that the outward Order and Regularity of the World is kept up, (so far as it is kept up) chiefly thro' the Influence of Considerations of This Kind; even with regard to the *real* and *internal* Goodness of particular Persons, Temporal Inducements are (no doubt) frequently of great Use, tho' *not without* Those of another World, yet *in Subserviency to them*. Many there are, and always will be, whom *present* Advantages will sensibly affect, when Persuasives of an higher Nature *if proposed alone*, would be lost upon them. Worldly Motives are therefore of great Use as *Auxiliaries* to Heavenly ones. They are always *at hand*; They are besides peculiarly adapted to those

those Minds to which the Influence of the others could not be so successfully apply'd; and they may often preserve the Innocence of the really Virtuous at their otherwise unguarded Moments. The Soul, when assaulted by a powerful Temptation, may upon the Strength of Temporal Motives hold out so long, till the stronger but more distant Forces of the other World can be call'd in to its Succour and Relief.

Let us consider, for instance, the Case of *Young* and unprincipled *Minds*, at the *first awaking* of the Faculties of Reflection, and (as I may say) at their *first Entrance into the Moral World*. What a deplorable Variety of irregular Appetites and unlawful Pursuits would soon discover themselves here, were such Persons left, unacquainted as they must yet be supposed to be with ^a *the Powers of the World to come*, to act at *all Adventures*; were not their Hopes and their Fears timely interested on the Side of Virtue, and their Affections fix'd by some present Views in a right Course before they could be too deeply engaged in a wrong One. 'Tis true indeed, Views of this Kind can of themselves only give them ^b *the Form, not the Power, of Godliness*: Yet 'tis something to restrain them from the outward

a Heb. VI. 5.

b 2 Tim. III. 5.

Acts of Sin; something to engage them in the outward Acts of Duty; something, I mean, *in Order* to higher Attainments, tho' perhaps Nothing, or next to Nothing, *without them*.

Nay farther, as to Persons of *riper Years* and more confirm'd Habits; Temporal Motives may (under the Influence of *Divine Grace*) have considerable Success in *reclaiming* the Vicious *from* a Bad Course of Life, tho' not so frequently or so easily as in early *initiating* the Young *in* a Good one. The present Uneasiness and Unsuccessfulness of Vice when sensibly felt, and the Prospect of Peace, Credit, and Prosperity in the Practice of Virtue, when properly display'd, may prevail on such Persons to *change Sides* at least *for a Time*, and to *make the Experiment* of what they hear so much recommended. And perhaps this will be no inconsiderable Point gain'd. Passion will at least be check'd, and Reason and Reflection set to Work. A bare Suspension of irregular Pursuits gains Men Leisure and Coolness to attend to the Nature and Reasonableness of Virtue: It will rouse their Thoughts from that Slumber, and recollect them from that Dissipation, into which an Habit of Vice naturally casts them: In a Word, it will leave them in a proper Temper to comply with those

those nobler Recommendations of Goodness, which a *disengaged* Mind can hardly for any long Time continue a *Stranger* to. — And if Men are *at last* induced to serve God upon regular Principles and proper Motives; We may humbly hope our Judge will not *be strict to mark the Beginnings* of our Services, nor make any Deductions from our Reward on Account of the Weakness and Imperfection of them.

Upon the whole; *Real* Goodness and the *inward* Habit of Virtue and Holiness is that, which *alone* a wise and holy God will finally accept and reward. But then we say, that Actions *outwardly* Good and such as are perform'd on *Temporal* Considerations only, may be *hopeful Preparatives* to real Goodness tho' no *real Evidences*, no *proper Parts*, of it. *Motives of this* World may (under Divine Grace) be happy *Means* of Men's *Conversion* to Virtue; but *Motives of the next* alone will secure Men's *Proficiency* in *Godliness*.

The Application I would make of what has been said for the Regulation of our Thoughts and Affections, is briefly This: That, tho' we need not *wholly exclude* worldly Considerations from our Minds, yet we should *beware* how we allow them the *first Place*, the *principal Influence* there. Motives of this Kind are indeed

deed only adapted to a *weak* and *imperfect* State of Goodness, and such as comes far short of That *Perfection* which we *Christians* are taught to aspire after. We are exhorted to ^a *walk by Faith, not by Sight*: To ^b *set our Affection on Things above, not on Things on the Earth*: To have ^c *our Conversation in Heaven*. ^d *The Life that now is*, makes but the *least Part* of the Christian's *Portion*, and therefore deserves the *least Part* of his *Care*. 'Tis a Christian's proper Character, to ^e *look not on the Things that are seen but on the Things that are not seen*: And that for this unanswerable Reason, because *the Things that are seen are temporal, but the Things that are not seen are Eternal*.

Permit me to carry this Application a little farther; to Those among Us, I mean, whose Business it *is* or *may be* to recommend the Practice of Virtue and Piety to others. — We shall, no Doubt, often find it expedient in our Exhortations to *moral* and even *religious* Duties to enlarge upon the *temporal Advantages* of Virtue: To let Men see, that *ordinarily*, and that both from the *Natural Tendency* of Things and by the *Blessing of God*,

a 2 Cor. V. 7.

b Coloss. III. 2.

c Phil. III. 20.

d 1 Tim. IV. 8.

e Cor. IV. 18.

Length of Days is in her Right-Hand and in her Left-Hand Riches and Honour. — But still we see *what Rank Motives* of this Kind ought to have in the Views of our Hearers, and *what Stress* should therefore be laid upon them by ourselves. Our Exhortations, in short, tho' they may be *bottom'd on this Earth*, should always *reach up to Heaven* : In other Words, we may recommend Virtue to our Hearers from its *present Advantages* ; but then we should always *leave upon their Minds* the more noble Influence of its future and more excellent Rewards. So shall we approve ourselves as *good Stewards of this manifold Grace of GOD* ; as *Workmen that need not to be ashamed*, RIGHTLY DIVIDING *the Word of Truth*.

To conclude : We should, all of us, look upon temporal Blessings as *gracious Supports* and as *additional Encouragements* to us in our Christian Course rather than as any *proper or final Rewards* of it. We should always remember that ^a *our Treasure is in Heaven*, and *let our Hearts be there also*. There, and there only, should our Views and our Wishes terminate, because 'tis *there alone that true Joys are to be found*. — So shall we ^b *use this World as not abusing it* : We shall be alike prepared

a Matt. VI. 21.

b 1 Cor. VII. 31.

to partake of its good Things with Moderation, or with Resignation to bear the Want of them. Disappointments will not *affright*, nor Successes *allure*, us from our Duty: But we shall by the Blessing of God, and thro' the Merits of our dear Redeemer, *"so pass thro' Things Temporal that we finally lose not the Things Eternal.*

a Collect.

S E R M O N I V .

I T I M. IV. 8.

—*Godliness is profitable unto all Things,
having Promise of the Life that now
is, and of that which is to come.*

WITHOUT entering into a full and particular Account of the Occasion of these Words and the Relation they stand in to the Context ; we need only observe, that the Apostle is here making a Comparifon between *Bodily Exercife* and *Godlinefs*. The *Former* (whatever might be meant by it, which is Matter of Difpute among Commentators) He feems to intimate, is not without its Ufe : It is *profitable* ; but then it *profiteth little* ; its Ufe is very much confined ; either very fmall in Degree, very narrow in Extent, or very fhort in Duration. Whereas the Ufe of the *latter* is of a more excellent, more extenfive, more lafting Nature : *It is profitable unto all Things :*

Things: Its Profitableness reaches to every Circumstance, every Period of our Existence. It very far excels that of the other even in this Life; and yet it does not, like That, terminate with it. It will accompany us into the other World, and will be as Endless as our very Being. *Godliness is profitable unto all Things; having Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

By *Godliness* we sometimes understand the Performance of our Duty to GOD, abstracted from the Consideration of our Duty to ourselves or others; and thus the Term is often used in the sacred Writings. But, I conceive, the Apostle did not in This Place use, nor is it necessary for us to consider, it in This *limited* Sense, but rather as taking in the *whole Compass* of our Duty; or perhaps as meant *principally* of our Duty to GOD, but then not as *opposed* to those Duties we owe to our Neighbour and ourselves, but as *productive* of them, and *comprehending* them under it.

My Business then will be, to recommend to You the Practice of Virtue and Religion from the *Profitableness* of it. The Advantages here proposed are of two Sorts, respecting *This Life* and *the Next*; and of each it may be proper to treat distinctly and apart, because if either of them be omitted, the Recommen-

dation of Godliness will not be so compleat or so generally successful. But when Godliness comes recommended by Advantages of *Both* Kinds, there can (one would think) be no Room for deliberating about so *gainful* a Proposal.

I shall therefore endeavour to illustrate the Truth of the Apostle's Assertion in my Text with regard

1. *To the Life that now is:* And
2. *To that which is to come.*

After which I would leave upon Your Minds a *Caution* or two relating to this Subject, by Way of *Conclusion* from the Whole.

“*The Life that now is,*” is an Expression which may be understood Two Ways; either of the *real Happiness* of this Life as *abstracted* from all outward Advantages of Riches, Honours and the like; or of *that Happiness* which is generally apprehended to *consist in* these outward Advantages. This is far from being a Distinction without a Difference. For, tho’ the Generality of Mankind are apt to confound the *real Happiness* of Life with the *outward Possessions* of it; yet Scripture, Reason, and constant Experience teach us that they are often separated, and should always be by us distinguished, from each other. And accordingly there are two Methods of illustrating

trating the Point before us : One is, by shewing the Profitableness of Godliness *by itself* and *in Preference* to all other Pursuits or Schemes of human Happiness ; the other is, by shewing its Profitableness not *in Preference* to other Pursuits, but *from its Conduciveness to the Success* of them. I shall confine myself to neither of these Methods ; but shall endeavour to make out this single Proposition, which seems to comprehend them Both, namely, That *Godliness is the most promising Method for the Attainment of the Good Things of this World, as far as They are necessary or conducive to Happiness.*

The *Good Things* of this World are of different Kinds, and go by various Names. But the *principal* of them according to the *common* Estimation, those of them, however, which the Time will permit us at present to consider, are usually called *Riches* : And in regard to these the Limitation just laid down is more especially to be attended to. For, if Men will understand by *Riches* nothing but *large Estates* or *immense Possessions* &c. if They will allow nothing to come under that Denomination but an Abundance of Superfluities, either to be *hoarded up* for *no Profit to the Owner save the Beholding of it with his Eyes*, or to be thrown away upon his Extravagancies

cies or his Vices; if this, I say, be Men's Notion of Riches, then We dare not undertake for Godliness, that it shall be instrumental in the Procuring of *them*. For, as to the *Promise* of God, He has indeed engaged to *supply the Wants* of His faithful Servants, but not to provide them with any such Abundance, or for any such Purposes as these: And as to the *Natural Tendency* of Things, Godliness is so far from attaining Riches of this Kind, that it will hardly allow us to desire or seek after them. But then we say at the same Time, that such Abundance, how necessary soever it may be to answer some Men's Conception of *Riches*, is by no means needful, nor (if rightly consider'd) really conducive to *Happiness*; it being generally found, that in proportion as a Man's Riches exceed the *Middle State*, his Cares encrease, and his Enjoyment lessens. And surely, it should not be made any Exception against the Profitableness of Godliness in this respect, that it does not procure for us such Abundance as could *not* make us *more* happy than we might be without it, and would in all Probability make us *much less* so.

The Truth is, to think that *a Man's Life consists in the Abundance of the Things which*

a Luk. XII. 15.

be

he possesseth, is to make a very *false* Judgment of it. To be *Rich* is certainly a Term of *Comparative* Import; not to be estimated from any *determinate Quantity* of the good Things of Life, but from the *just Proportion* of a Man's Possessions to His Wants and his Wishes. He whose Desires are fully satisfied with what he possesseth, and whose Incomes rather exceed than fall short of his Necessities, may properly be accounted *Rich*, be the Quantity of his Substance what it will. *Rich*, I say, he may properly be accounted as far as *Happiness* is concern'd; and *farther than that*, I suppose, no wise Man will desire an Ensurance of any Thing in This World.

But, if this Account be true (as I am persuaded it is) then the *Profitableness of Godliness* in this Particular may easily be made out. If to be *Rich* is to have one's Possessions duly adjusted to his Exigencies real or imaginary; ^a*Godliness with Contentment must be great Gain*; inasmuch as it requires Us to contract both our Desires and our Expences; to be moderate in our Pleasures, and frugal in our Management, and ^b*in whatever State we are, therewith to be content*.

Should You say, "This is, at best, but a
" *Negative Way* of growing Rich, or indeed

a 1 Tim. VI. 6.

b Phil. IV. 11.

“not so properly a Way of growing Rich as
“of remaining contentedly Poor:” I might
reply as before, that so long as our Desires are
satisfied, and our Exigencies answer’d, We are
sufficiently Rich for all the Purposes of Life.
But, not to insist farther upon This. Possibly
You may have a View to the *Raising a For-
tune*, and *making* what is usually called a *de-
cent Provision* for Your own Accommodation,
and that of Your respective Families or De-
pendents, in Life. And *something* we dare
undertake for Godliness in this respect also.
We may not indeed promise that it shall make
any Man *suddenly* or *immensely* Rich, but that
it shall put him in a Way of becoming *com-
petently* so: Nor may we promise that it shall
do even This, *certainly* and *infallibly*, (*that*
no human Method, whether of Virtue or
Vice, can pretend to do;) but as constantly,
as, nay far more constantly than, the contrary
Practice: Always taking along with us this
equitable *Supposition*, that the Votaries of each
set out in the World in *equal* Circumstances,
and with the *like* Advantages or Disadvanta-
ges in *other* respects.

That the Good Man has a *fairer* Prospect
of competent Success in his Temporal Affairs
than his unrighteous Neighbour, may be il-
lustrated by Considerations drawn both from
the

the *Ordinary Dispensations* of Providence, and from the *Natural Tendency* of Things. The *Apostle* refers the Prospect which Godliness has of the *Life that now is*, as well as of *that which is to come*, wholly to the *Promise* of GOD; and 'tis certain that the *greatest* Stress ought always to be laid upon *That*, indeed the *whole* Stress with regard to the *Life to come*. But tho' Temporal Prosperity is confessedly *the Gift of GOD*, yet (according to His wise Appointment in the Constitution of Things) the Practice of Virtue does in its own *Tendency* not a little contribute to procure it. — The Vicious Habits of *Idleness*, *Prodigality*, *Litigiousness*, and the like, are generally found in fact as inconsistent with *Prosperity* as they are with *Godliness*. Nobody can have miss'd of observing, what Obstructions they lay in a Man's Way to the Getting of an Estate, or what Difficulties they bring him to in the Keeping of one. And Your own Experience may (I hope) sufficiently inform You, what a beneficial Tendency in both respects those good Qualities of *Industry*, *Frugality*, *Prudent Management*, &c. naturally have, which are either the necessary Parts, or however the usual Attendants, of Godliness.

Vice is indeed in General an *expensive* Thing: It makes large Demands upon a Man's Estate,
and

and is continually ^a *crying, Give, Give*. Whereas Virtue and Godliness are provident and careful. And, tho' they may make *some* Deductions from a Man's Time or his Substance for the Service of God, or the Relief of his needy Brethren; yet These fall *far short* of such Deductions as are necessarily occasion'd by the Maintenance of the greatest Part of Vices. Indeed, when conducted by the Rules of Prudence and Discretion (and that they should be otherwise neither Virtue nor Godliness require,) they are, in their Nature no way prejudicial to a Man's Prosperity; and if we take in the *Blessing of God* attending them, they are often greatly conducive to it. ^b *There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, yet it tendeth to Poverty*.

Nor does the Practice of Virtue and Honesty only promote Men's Temporal Interests *directly* and *immediately*, but also by means of that *Credit and Reputation* which it secures to him from those about him. A Man of Character for *Integrity* is one whom all Men desire to have Intercourse with: They can here carry on their Dealings *agreeably* because *freely*; and freely, because *without Suspicion* of Deceit or knavish Design. Whereas the *dis-*

^a Prov. XXX. 15.

^b Ibid. XI. 24.

honest Person when once discover'd (and long undiscover'd such an one must not expect to be) is avoided by every fair Dealer: All Correspondence with Him is obstructed by the tedious Forms of Mistrust and Jealousy. And, what the Consequence of this must be with regard to the *Success* of any Occupation or Employment; as on the other Hand, how very *serviceable* the Character of Uprightness is in carrying on any beneficial Commerce; are Points, which I suppose, I need no otherwise illustrate, than by *appealing* to *Your own* Observation of what every Day passes before You in the World.

Add to all This, what is a very material Consideration; that though the Quantity of Wealth which the Virtuous and the Wicked Man possess should be equal, nay tho' that of the Latter should be far greater; yet as to every Purpose for which Wealth can be desirable, *a small Thing that the Righteous hath is better than great Riches of the Ungodly.*

For let us suppose (what sometimes in fact happens) that the unrighteous Man should amass together great Possessions, should, in the Prophet's Expression, *b load himself with thick Clay*: Yet, alas! *to what Purpose is all that*

^a Psal. XXXVII. 16.

^b Hab. II. 6.

Expenſe of Time, of Eaſe, of Innocence, which he has been at in the Accumulation of ſo much Treafure? Why, perhaps that he may have *the Beholding of it with his Eyes, without the Power to eat thereof*: Or perhaps, that he may make it ſubſervient to his impure Luſts, or ſquander away that and his Health together upon his Extravagancies: Or perhaps, that he may be forced to ſurrender it to thoſe Attacks which his irregular Acquiſition of it will probably provoke againſt him: Or (if it eſcape theſe uſual Attendants upon ^a *Wealth gotten by Vanity* and indireſt Means) that he may convey it with a Curſe to his Poſterity, and ſo, by miniſtring Fewel to their Luſts and Occaſion to their Intemperance, make *them* alſo miſerable in Both Worlds. — Surely there is Nothing *extremely deſireable* in all This! And yet — ^b *ſo is every one that heapeth up Treafure unto himſelf, and is not Rich towards God!*

But where ^c *the Bleſſing of the LORD maketh Rich, He addeth no ſuch Sorrow with it*. When This World's Goods come into the Upright Man's Hand they generally meet with quite different Succeſs. One great Part of thoſe Loſſes Men moſt frequently ſuſtain is occaſion'd by the ill-regulated Paſſions of thoſe

a Prov. XIII. 11.

b Luk. XII. 21.

c Prov. X. 22.

about

about them. But a greater Security against These, under the Divine Providence, there cannot be than the Practice of Godliness: ^a *For who is he, ordinarily speaking, that will harm You, if Ye be Followers of that which is Good?* The fair and honest Methods by which the Good Man acquires his Wealth silence the Murmurs of Envy; and his inoffensive Use and benevolent Employment of it disarms even Malice itself, and ^b *makes his very Enemies be at Peace with him.* Hence the Possessions of a Good Man are generally transmitted unenvied and entire, and (which is more) *with a Blessing* to those that come after him; having first enabled him to live decently and creditably, agreeably to his Station, and answerably to the innocent Customs, the reasonable Expectations, of those about him: And (which is their greatest Commendation) having given him Opportunities of relieving and supplying the Wants of his Fellow-Christians; and so of ^c *laying up for himself a lasting Treasure in Heaven, where no Thief approacheth, neither Moth corrupteth.*

These are the Riches, which are the general Rewards of the honest Endeavours of an upright Man. General, I say, because we

^a 1 Pet. III. 13.

^b Prov. XVI. 7.

^c Matt. VI. 20.

do not pretend to say, *Universal*. ^a *Time and Chance will happen to all human Affairs: The Race is not always to the swift, nor the Battle to the Strong, nor yet Bread to the Wise, nor Riches to Men of Understanding.* GOD has wisely so order'd Matters, as that the Connection between Godliness and Temporal Prosperity should *not* be *absolutely necessary*. This might, and probably would, have been misinterpreted, as leaving the Affairs of the World *wholly to second Causes*; or it might, by too *forcibly* recommending Virtue upon *present* Motives, have in great Measure diminished the *Praise*, and destroyed the Rewardableness, of It: Above all, it might have encouraged even well-disposed Men to ^b *live too much at Ease in their Possessions*; and might have suffered them to forget, that the *best Part* of their Inheritance is yet to be expected and sought for in quite *another Country*.

2. Which brings me to consider the other Branch of the *Profitableness of Godliness*, namely, Its *having Promise of the Life that is to come*.

And indeed, notwithstanding all that hath *as yet* been said in favour of *Godliness*, our Recommendation of it would be very incomplete, if we *could* proceed *no farther*. For,

^a Eccl. IX. 11.

^b Eccclus. XLI. 1.

without the Supposal of a happy Immortality to come after this *short* Life, of what Importance could *all* the Riches and Affluence that can be found in it, appear to a Being capable, as Man is, of carrying his Views infinitely beyond it! — *Here*, then, the *Profitableness of Godliness* most eminently displays itself; in that it doth not, after providing for our Accommodation in this inconsiderable Portion of our Existence, leave us without any farther Prospects; but secures to us a Reversion of Happiness, complete enough to fill the Capacities, and to run commensurate with the Duration, of our Immortal Souls.

I enquire not here, what Evidences the *Heathen* World had of the Reality of such an everlasting State of Happiness to Good Men. It is certainly much more safe and satisfactory for us *Christians* to ground our Expectations, as my Text grounds our Encouragement, upon the *Promise* of GOD: And it should be sufficient for us, that *the Foundation of God standeth sure*, with regard to this most important Article. In whatever Doubts unassisted Reason might have left us about a future State, * *the Veil is now by Revelation taken away. We all now, with open Face, behold the Glory of the LORD: A Glory, the Affu-*

a 1 Cor. III. 16, 18.

rances whereof are so full and express in holy Scripture, that We may call it *the Glory*, not *which shall be*, but, which is already, *Revealed*: Revealed indeed It is *not*, as to the *Substance* or particular *Manner* of It; because It is a Glory too big for our narrow Capacities to comprehend, too bright for our feeble Sight to contemplate: But revealed It is so fully as to the *Certainty* and the *boundless Duration* of It, that it is as unnecessary as it would be endless to cite particular Passages in Proof of this Doctrine; a Doctrine, the Evidences whereof shine forth in every Page of the Gospel.

Here also We may venture to speak to Godly Men with *less Reserve* or Diffidence; to *confine* the Promise *wholly* to *them*, and to *assure* every such Person of *infallible* Success. The Good Things of this Life, being of small Value and short Continuance, are sometimes denied to God's greatest Favourites, and are by the more successful among these shared in common with Persons of a different Character. ^a *Our wise and gracious Father causeth His Sun to shine on the Evil and on the Good, and sendeth Rain on the Just and on the Unjust.* But, in the other World, the Case will be very different. At our Departure hence, we

^a Matt. V. 45.

shall find ^a *an impassible Gulph fixed*, a final Separation made, betwixt the opposite Parties : And, whilst God shall *send Darknes upon Those, These shall have Light in their Dwellings*. The Good Man may meet with Disappointments or Losses in *the Life that now is* : But *the Life to come* is That ^b *better Part* of the Promise made to Godliness, *which shall not be taken away from him*.

And certainly, when we are secure as to *This Part* of the Promise, we need not be very solicitous about Exceptions in the Other. *Everlasting Happiness* is a *Pearl of such* inestimable *Price*, that our Conduct would be fully justified, should we ^c *part with all we have* in this World for the *Purchase* of it. — Let us allow to a Life of Sin all the *present* Advantages over a Life of Godliness that Imagination can give it : Let us allow (what is all that it can pretend to, and far more than it has ever yet made good) that it is the *certain*, and the *only*, Method of securing to ourselves an easy, a plentiful, an honourable Passage thro' this World : Yet, what is there in *all This*, supposing it must be succeeded by an Eternity of Torment, sufficient to engage a rational Choice. Put the Case, that the Godly Man, even on the Account of his Godli-

^a Luk. XVI. 26.^b Ibid. X. 42.^c Matt. XIII. 46.

ness, were constantly exposed to Disappointment and Distress; whilst his unrighteous Neighbour should as constantly succeed in his Schemes of Gain and Grandeur: Yet, after we have followed Each of them to his Grave, *We have seen an End of the One's Happiness, and of the Other's Misery: Here the Good Man confessedly ^a rests from his Labours; Nor is it pretended by the greatest Admirers of the Wicked Man here, that his ^b Pomp shall follow him hereafter. Could we suppose indeed, that This were to be to Both the Period of their Existence; I will not say, but the Life of the Good Man might, with some Show of Reason, be counted Madness; whilst the prosperous Sinner might be thought to have managed tolerably well. But — what if Each of them has an Eternity of Happiness or Misery still behind! What if They are now to change Condition for Ever! What if he that ^c in this Life received his Evil Things is to be for ever comforted, and he that received his Good Things for ever tormented! Who does not see where the Madness lies, even if all that has been supposed were found constantly true in regard to the Situation of Good and Bad Men in This World? But, if the Supposition itself is utterly false, as I have (I hope, sufficiently)*

^a Rev. XIV. 13. ^b Psal. XLIX. 17. ^c Luk. XVI. 25.
proved

proved it to be : If *Godliness* gives us not only an equal, but a much *fairer*, *Chance* for Happiness in This Life, and over-and-above the *sole Title* to, and an *infallible Assurance* of, Everlasting Happiness in the Next. — I will not say, to which Side the *Madness* is to be charged. A wrong Choice, in a Case so plain, and in an Affair also of such infinite Importance, is what one could hardly think possible, did we not see it in numberless Instances actually made.

Upon the Whole, then : *Ye see Your Calling Brethren* ; What You may expect from the Service of GOD and the Practice of *Godliness* : No less than *the Life that now is and that which is to come* ; the Former generally, and for the most Part ; the Latter *universally*, and without Exception. — ^a *If now it seemeth Evil unto You to serve the LORD upon These Terms, choose You this Day, whom You will serve,* ^b *The Wages of Sin*, we own, may possibly be some trivial Gain, some momentary Gratification, in this Life ; but will far more probably be Disappointment and Vexation even here ; and will certainly be *Death*, Eternal Death and Torment hereafter : Whereas, *the Gift of GOD*, to His faithful Servants is *Life*, Temporal and *Eternal* ; that is, Happiness as

^a Josh. XXIV. 15.^b Rom. VI. 23.

great as is consistent with their Condition during their Abode in this World; but Happiness complete and Endless in the other. —

^a *Ye have, therefore, Life and Death set before You. Be just to Yourselfes. Choose Life.*

^b *Remember This and shew Yourselfes MEN.*

Permit me only to leave upon Your Minds a *Caution* or two relating to the present Subject; by Way of Inference from what has been said. And,

First, We should beware of allowing Secular Motives the principal Influence upon our Minds.

For, though the *Gospel* as well as the *Law* sometime makes Use of such Inducements, yet This (we may observe) is done but very sparingly, and never with any great Strefs laid upon them. Motives of this Kind are indeed adapted only to a weak and imperfect State of Goodness, and such as falls short of Those exalted Attainments, that are expected in Us *Christians*. ^c *We are exhorted to walk by Faith, not by Sight; to ^d set our Affection on Things above, not on Things on the Earth; to have ^e our Conversation in Heaven.* Temporal Good Things make but the least Part of the Christian's Portion, and therefore deserve the least

^a Deut. XXX. 19.

^b Isai. XLVI. 8.

^c 2 Cor. V. 7.

^d Coloss. III. 2.

^e Phil. III. 20.

Part of his Care. It is the Good Christian's Character to ^a *look not at the Things that are seen but at the Things that are not seen*: Always bearing in Mind this immense Difference between them, that *the Things which are seen are Temporal, but the Things which are not seen are Eternal.* — But,

Secondly, We must not start aside from our Duty on Account of any Failure in the Temporal Rewards of it.

This Caution, difficult as it may be to Those, who *have Hope in the present Life only*, must methinks be easy to Those whose Views are principally directed to a far better. If we accustom ourselves to consider the Advantages of this World only as *secondary* Incitements to Godliness, and such as *are not worthy to be compared with* that primary one, the *Happiness reserved for Us in Heaven*; We can hardly be affrighted from our Duty by any Circumstances that may attend us *here*: Because we can never be sure but that Those Circumstances may contribute to the Success of our *main Pursuit*; nay we may always be assured, that by good Management the most afflictive Circumstances may be made to *work together to our highest Good*. The Delay of our Harvest, for a little while at most, will not make us

^a *weary in Well-doing*, so long as we rest assured, that *in due Season we shall reap* what is infinitely more worthy of our Pains, *if we faint not*. — On the other Hand,

Thirdly, Let us *beware of growing fond of this World by reason of any Successes we may be blessed with in it*.

^b *If Riches encrease, set not Your Heart upon them*, saith the Psalmist. This is a Piece of Advice, which he inculcates with some Earnestness; well knowing its Importance in itself, as also the great Need Men have to be reminded of it. Love of this World is indeed a Temptation, to which the prosperous Part of Mankind are exceedingly exposed. Whilst Men's Circumstances are narrow, or their Accommodations but moderate, they can preserve a proportionable Indifference to such Matters, and will probably sit as loose to the World, as it does to *them*. But Its Smiles and Embraces are not so easily resisted. When, by the Blessing of Providence, ^c *the Lot is fallen to us in a fair Ground, and we have a goodly Heritage*; we grow pleased and satisfied with ^d *having our Portion in this Life: We count ourselves happy Men*, and promise Plenty and Enjoyment to our ^e *Souls for many Years*;

^a Gal. VI. 9.

^b Psal. LXII. 10.

^c Ibid. XVI. 6.

^d Ibid. XVII. 14.

^e Ibid. XLIX. 18.

not confidering in the mean while that we are but *Strangers and Pilgrims on this Earth*; and that by *defpifing* or undervaluing, we fhall certainly forfeit, what alone deserves to be called, *our Birtbright*.

Laftly, From the Whole of what has been faid, let us draw this important Conclufion, “*That the Succels of all our Endeavours*, in
“*regard to this World as well as the next*,
“*depends ultimately on the good Providence of*
“*GOD.*”

^a *Let This Saying*, then, *ſink down into Your Ears*, and have its due Effect upon Your Lives and Converſations. In Conſequence hereof, before entering on any Undertaking, at leaſt any Undertaking of Moment, take Time to aſk Yourſelves ſome ſuch plain Queſtion as This: — “*Is the Affair in which I am engaging ſo circumſtanced, as that I may reaſonably hope for GOD’s Bleſſing to accompany me in the Proſecution of it?*” — If upon an honeſt Enquiry into This Particular You find all right; You may then proceed with Chearfulneſs, relying either upon the Succels of Your preſent Deſign, or upon ſomething ſtill *more convenient for You*. But, if Your Heart condemn You; reſolve inſtantly to draw back, aſſuring Yourſelves that ^b *there is no Wiſdom nor*

^a Luk. IX. 44.

^b Prov. XXI. 30.

Understanding nor Counsel against the LORD. Be Your Schemes, humanly speaking, never so well laid, yet without the Concurrence of a superiour Power, You may depend upon it, They will come to Nothing. You may, in particular, form *friendly Societies*, in order to secure Yourself and Your Families from the Decays of Trade and the Approaches of Poverty: And so long as by *Fearing God* and *Keeping His Commandments*, and bringing up Your Families in the same Religious Manner, You engage His Patronage and Friendship; You will deserve Commendation, and every benevolent Man will *wish You good Luck in the Name of the LORD.* But should You neglect to *set God always before You*, or to secure His Blessing to Your Affairs by constantly attending His Worship publick and private, and *Doing those Things that are pleasing in His Sight*; in short, by the uniform Practice of social Virtues and Religious Duties, of *Godliness and Honesty*; You are virtually counteracting the Designs of His Providence, and may be assured Your Associations will end accordingly. *Though, Hand join in Hand, the Wicked shall not be finally unpunished.* Ungodly Men may please themselves with their promising Beginnings, and be flushed with the Hopes of a successful Exit. But infinite Wisdom hath in-

numerable

numerable Ways of defeating their best-concerted Projects, or even of conveying a Curse under the present seeming Success of them.

^a *I have seen the Ungodly in great Power, (says the Psalmist) and flourishing like a Green Bay-tree. But what follows? ^b I went by — and (lo!) he was gone: I sought him — but his Place could no-where be found. I cannot leave with You any Conclusion more apposite than his Advice immediately following. — “^c Keep “Innocency, and take Heed unto the Thing “that is right: For That shall bring a Man “Peace at the last.”*

a Psal. XXXVII. 36.

b Ibid. 37.

c Ibid. 38.

S E R M O N V.

PROVERBS III. 17.

Her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness.

“**T**HAT Virtue is sufficiently recommended to our Choice by Her own native Charms, abstracted from every Consideration of Advantage to ourselves;” is a Notion, which may probably gain an easy Assent with us, as it compliments us with a *Generosity* which we are very apt to affect; and especially as it sooths us with a Piece of Flattery, that of our *Self-sufficiency*, to the Belief of which we lye exceedingly open. But Experience soon gives a Check to our ill-supported Ambition: It brings us down from those Heights which we vainly assume to ourselves; and forces us to own, to the Mortification of our Pride, that such Maxims are by no means adapted to our *Nature* or *Circumstances*. *Happiness* we all eagerly and incessantly pursue: *This* is the Mark,

to

to which our Aims are, and (while our Nature continues) will be, at least *principally*, directed: And therefore, we may be sure, no Proposals can be rightly calculated *for us*, where the Consideration of *Happiness* is left out or neglected.

Accordingly we find the inspired Writers, in the best and most consistent Scheme of Morality that ever was offer'd to Mankind, generally proceeding upon *other* Principles, than such as that first above-mention'd, in *their* Recommendations of Virtue. Instances of what is here observed need not be enumerated; especially since we have so very eminent an one in the well-known Passage now before us. — The Wise King *Solomon* is here, as in several other Places, recommending the Choice and Pursuit of *Wisdom*: By which He means, *not* a mere *speculative Acquaintance* with the Natures and Properties of Things, but a well-form'd Judgment about the *Measures of Action*, discovering itself in a suitable *Conduct*; in other Words, a right Understanding and regular Practice of all the several Duties and Offices of Life. *This* Wisdom He recommends from the most generally engaging Motive, the *Happiness* attending it; ^a *Happy is he that findeth Wisdom, the Man that getteth Understand-*

a Verſ. 13.

ing; and to make his Recommendation still more successful, He introduces Wisdom as an exalted *Personage*, holding forth to her Votaries Advantages of Various Kinds, those of *Body* in one Hand, and those of *Fortune* in the other: ^a *Length of Days is in her Right-Hand, and in her Left-Hand Riches and Honour.* One Thing however was still wanting, and that so material an one, that as the fore-mention'd Advantages could not of themselves furnish it, so neither could they make Men happy without it. To compleat all therefore, *This* also is superadded; for the sublime Description goes on in the Words of my Text, ^b *Her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness.*

The Words thus explain'd naturally lead me to recommend to Your Choice a Life of Virtue and Piety, particularly from the Consideration of the Pleasures attending it.

“A bold Undertaking This!” will the *Sensualist* be ready to say, “and something like that of *Reconciling Contradictions*! For what else is it to pretend, that a *Life of Religion* “*is a Life of Pleasantness*? Religion which “seems rather calculated to rob us of those “Enjoyments we already have, than to furnish us with any additional ones? Which “finds us placed in the Midst of sensible Ob-

a Vers. 16. b 17.

“jects, and continually solicited by them, and
“restrains us from the Participation of them
“by a severe *Interdict*? Which engages us in
“a perpetual *War* with our Inclinations and
“Appetites; expressly enjoining us to *deny*
“ourselves, and to *mortify our Affections*? —
“And can You, after all this, pretend that
“the Practice of Virtue and Religion is the
“Way to Pleasure? Might You not as well
“tell us, that we may *please ourselves* at the
“same Time that we are *denying ourselves*;
“that we may *gratify* our Inclinations even
“whilst we are *mortifying* them: That is,
“that we may both *please* and *displease* our-
“selves at the *same Time*?”

Now in Answer to all this, there being in the foregoing Allegations, as in most other *Objections*, some Truth mixed with much Falsehood, I shall endeavour,

I. To *explain* the *real Import* of the Assertion in my Text, and to guard against all groundless Expectations from it.

II. To *illustrate* more directly its *Truth* when rightly understood, by shewing that the *Ways of Virtue* are, in the justest Sense, *Ways of Pleasantness*.

First then ; With regard to the *real Import* of the Assertion before us, and what it is that we undertake to prove in Confirmation of it : We freely admit, that Wisdom or the Practice of Virtue and Holiness may be far enough from being pleasant or delightful to our degenerate Nature ; especially if still farther corrupted by Ill Example or Ill Company ; at least till it is rectified by a good Education, assisted by the Grace of God. And accordingly, We are very ready to own, that there *are Gratifications*, called by the Name of Pleasures, which Religious Wisdom is by no means qualified to procure for us. Gratification is a *Relative Thing*, depending not absolutely on the *outward Objects themselves*, but on their *Suitableness to the Faculties* employ'd about them. Very different Objects therefore will be agreeable or pleasing to different Persons according as their Faculties or Tastes are variously disposed ; and variously those will always be disposed so long as Men shall continue to be Free and accountable Creatures. — Now we are far from undertaking to prove, that Virtue and Piety shall be of so flexible a Nature as to adapt themselves to *every Taste* how vitiated or depraved soever. For instance, to the *Glutton* and the *Drunkard*, to the *Lascivious* and the *Prophane*, We dare give no
Encourage-

Encouragement : The impertinent *Talebearer* and Retailer of *Scandal* must ^a *study to be Quiet* and *to do his own Business* ; and the Envious and Malicious, the Furious and Revengeful must ^b *put off the Old Man*, must divest themselves of their savage and diabolical Temper, before they must expect that the *Ways* of Religion shall be *to them Ways of Pleasantness*. Whilst These Persons retain the *same* Appetites, the *same* Relish, they now have, we do not pretend that Godliness hath any Pleasure for them : So far from this, that we freely declare to them, their Gratifications are such, that Religious Wisdom will not allow of, cannot consist with them. Thus far we are agreed. But then we must have Leave to dissent from These Persons, if They make this Concession of our's any *real Objection* against the Pleasantness of a Virtuous and Godly Life.

For, in the First Place ; the Entertainments just hinted at, and such like, from which Religion debars us, are not the *proper* Gratifications of *Man*, nor would they be at all *agreeable* to him, were his Relish kept in its *genuine* State, and such as is suitable to the Original *Dignity of his Nature*. The Inclinations ^c *which are from above* ; which were at first implanted in Man by his wise Creator, and

a 1 Theff. IV. 11.

b Eph. IV. 22.

c Jam. III.

are still cherish'd by the gracious Influences of the *Holy Spirit*, ^a *are first pure, then peaceable*. Whereas the Gratifications we are speaking of are adapted only to such a Taste as is ^b *earthly, sensual, devilish*. So far therefore as any Person is capable of Pleasure from such Objects or Employments as these, so far is he degenerated from what he *originally was* and still *ought to be*; so far he sinks into a State of Brutality or is even transform'd into a *Fiend of Darkness*. Now in our Recommendations of Virtue and Godliness we are *supposed* to address ourselves to Reasonable Creatures, to *Men*. And, if Men by a wilful Abuse of their Natural Faculties, shall have lost all Relish for such Gratifications as are properly *human*, such as are adapted to the superiour, the immortal Part of their Nature: If they leave themselves no Taste for any Entertainments but such as debase their Composition, are the Reproach of their Understandings, and of which it would be too favourable an Account to say only, that they degrade Them to a Level with *the Beasts that perish*: And if, after all This, They find themselves obliged to *say* of the Paths of Wisdom and Virtue, that *They have no Pleasure in them*:—Can there be any Difficulty in perceiving, *where the Fault really*

a Jam. III. 14, 19.

b Ibid. 17

lies? Or, can an Objection of this Sort come with any tolerable Grace from a Being, whose Privilege and Boast is the Faculty of Reason?

Besides: What if, after all, the Gratifications, from which Religious Wisdom debars us, should be found rather to usurp the *Name* than to answer the *Character* of *real* Pleasures? And yet a little Reflection, or however a very little Experience, may convince us that This is in fact the Case. The same Thing that makes us *laugh* may be far enough from making us *happy*. *True Pleasure*, as well as *real Grief*, is generally a sedate, *silent*, Thing: Or however, as far as *Happiness* is concern'd in it, it must imply something of *Duration* and Permanence; it must be estimated, not barely from the Beginning, but from the Progress, and especially from the Conclusion and Consequences, of an Entertainment: And in Truth, That Entertainment alone should be placed to the Account of Pleasure, which shall be found to have had an *Over-balance* at least of *Satisfaction* attending it. — Now, *which*, among the great Variety of criminal Gratifications can abide *This Test*? Those of *Riot* and *Excess* are manifestly condemn'd by it: The *Joy*, such at it is, accompanying them, can at best ^a *endure but for the*

^a Psal. XXX. 5.

Night, and then *Heaviness* literally cometh in the Morning. As to Gratifications of the malevolent Kind; Pain and Uneasiness must, surely, be an equally inseparable Attendant upon them. An ill-natured Jest, or a Piece of Scandal, may perhaps unaccountably divert us for a while, so far as to produce a Fit of noisy and seemingly real Mirth. But let a Person of Humanity consult his own Breast on such Occasions: Let him ask, whether there is that *Calmness* within, which should be an essential Ingredient in true Pleasure; or rather, whether in the Midst of such ^a *Laughter* the Heart be not sorrowful; and however, whether the End of That Mirth be not constantly *Heaviness*? Nay, as to Those gay Scenes of *Vanity*, which in the present refined Age have almost engrossed the Title of *Entertainments*: These also must, I presume, soon cease to be agreeable, when They cease to be innocent. Indeed, when They are most innocent; that is, when They are made Use of to fill up the Vacancies, (if any such there really can be) to relieve the Toils, and to suspend the Troubles, of Life; the very Names they are distinguish'd by, of *Amusements* or *Diversions*, intimate plainly enough that a short Refuge only, and not any real Enjoyment, is expected

^a Prov. XIV. 13.

from *them*. But, when they are allowed to occupy large Portions of Time, and are made (as, I fear, they too often are made) the *principal Business* of Life; They must surely *oppress* instead of *recreating* the Spirits, and become as inconsistent with the Satisfaction as they are with the Duty of a Rational Being. Or, if perhaps in *Youthful Years*, while the Spirits are fresh, Life should pass away with no considerable Interruption in a pleasing Round of thoughtless Gayety; yet let us be assured, This Expedient will not serve our Purpose *throughout*. Could ^a *a Man live many such Years, and rejoice in them all; yet Days of Darknesh will come*, when a Mind unfurnish'd with useful Knowledge and virtuous Habits, shall find Cause enough to accommodate the Prophet's Complaint to its own Feelings, ^b *My Leanness, my Leanness: Woe unto me! the treacherous Dealers, Those vain Amusements that have wasted the best Part of my Life, and left me no Equivalent for my choicest Moments, have dealt treacherously with me: Yea These treacherous Dealers have dealt very treacherously.*

Upon the Whole, I doubt not but the same Judgment may be made of all the other Kinds of *criminal Indulgence*: Namely, that they

^a Eccl. XI. 8.

^b Isai. XXIV. 16.

are, either in *themselves* or in their *Consequences* even in this World, as inconsistent with *true* and *lasting* Pleasure as they are with Innocence. Religion, *ordinarily* at least, denies us no Gratifications but such as are either in the very Enjoyment *accompany'd* with Pain, or sure to be *closely follow'd* by it: And is therefore to be look'd on by us, not as the *Enemy* but as the *Guardian* of our Pleasures.

Our Blessed LORD, 'tis true, does enjoin us to ^a *Deny ourselves*; and the Injunction, tho' perhaps *most eminently* relating to His *first* Disciples and Followers, yet must by no means be understood as *peculiarly confined* to them. But, besides that our *Saviour* has surely done more than enough *for us* to reconcile us to this seemingly *hard saying*, and even to make us chearfully *take up our Cross* when we cannot *otherwise follow Him*: If we attend to the *real* Import of the Duty, so far as it is of *general* Obligation; we shall find Nothing in it so very unfavourable to true *Pleasure*, as we might at first imagine. To *deny ourselves* is not to deny *the Whole* of our Being; that is impracticable: Nor is it to deny the most *excellent Part* of it; that is at least unnecessary. 'Tis only to deny our *carnal Appetites*, those ^b *fleshly Lusts which war against the Soul*, or

^a Mark VIII. 34.

^b 1 Pet. II. 11.

if at any Time it respect our Understandings, we are only to deny the *Pride* and *Arrogance*, not the sober *Dictates* or the rational Entertainments of them. The Term, *Self*, is here taken in its most confined, indeed its most improper, Sense ; for a Part only, and that the least valuable, the worst Part of us. And in *this* Sense, we may, we must, *deny ourselves* and *please ourselves* at the same Time ; that is, we must deny the *inferiour* and please the *superiour* Part of our Composition ; we must *mortify* our inordinate *Affections* and *gratify* our *Reason* and *Conscience* ; we must strive against ^a *the Law in our Members* and be subject to the *Law of our Minds*. A *Contradiction* indeed this may be to *Flesh* and *Blood* ; but to the *distinguishing Faculty* of Human Nature it is most agreeable ; and should therefore, one would think, be the *Pleasure*, and must certainly be the *proper Happiness* of *Man*.

Not that, after all, we need be under any such dreadful Apprehensions, that at our Entrance upon a Life of Virtue and Religion we must take a final Leave of *All* the pleasing Objects of *Sense*. *That* Part of the Objection therefore which proceeds upon Supposition of any such Interdict as this, is founded on a

^a Rom. VII. 23.

strange Misapprehension, or an invidious Misrepresentation, of the Case. *Man* is a *sensible* as well as a *Reasonable* Being: And tho' the Pleasures which Religious Wisdom procures for us be chiefly of the *Latter* Sort, yet is she far from denying us *all* Gratifications of the *Former* Kind, or indeed ordinarily any but such as are some Way or other destructive of themselves. Nay, if the *Man of Pleasure* will vouchsafe to hear us, we dare venture to assure Him, that, in several very considerable Respects, the Man that conducts his Pleasures by the Rules of Religion shall have the Advantage of the Man that transgresses these Boundaries, even in the Gratifications of Sense, besides the many far *superiour* ones which the Former enjoys, whilst the Latter knows Nothing of them. I now proceed as was proposed,

II. To illustrate more directly the Assertion in my Text, by proving, that the *Ways of Virtue* are, to every well-disposed Mind, *Ways of Pleasantness*.

Pleasure and *Enjoyment* must be the *Result of the Presence of some agreeable Object to its correspondent Faculty*: And if so, then where either *Object* or *Faculty* is wanting, *Enjoyment* must be wanting too. But now, does not a
vicious

vicious and intemperate Use of what is *call'd* Pleasure tend naturally to destroy its own *Objects* by destroying that Substance which alone can supply them? And accordingly, how often do we observe Those who have *riotously gorged* themselves with the *Superfluities*, thereby reduced to a *Want* of even the *Necessaries*, of Life. Or, supposing a continued Course of Vicious Indulgences *should* leave the *Objects* of Pleasure in sufficient Quantity and Perfection; is it not, however, of the Nature of Excess to impair the *Faculties*? In fact, they who *exceed* the Bounds prescribed by Reason and Religion leave *true Pleasure* behind them. *Excessive Pleasure* is, if I may so speak, its *own Executioner*; and, by *faring sumptuously every Day*, Men generally very soon put it out of their Power ever to fare agreeably. — Whereas, the Moderation, which Wisdom and Virtue require, preserves both the *Materials* of Pleasure and our *Relish* for them. The Good Man (other Circumstances being supposed equal) can *command* some agreeable Entertainment when-ever he sees fit; and, when he hath done so, can always *enjoy* it.

Enjoy it *He* can (which is a farther great Advantage) pure and *unmixed*, with any such Bitterness as unbridled *Passion* is continually pouring into the Cup of an immoral, irreligious

gious Man, notwithstanding all the pleasing Ingredients and Opportunities for tasting them that this World can afford him, One would have thought that the same Temper which could make *Haman* boast of his Wealth and Grandeur, domestick Felicity and Court-Favour, might have rendered him contented and pleased, if not happy with it: Yet, if we will take his own Word, the Case was quite otherwise: *‘ All This, says He, availeth me Nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King’s Gate.* Thus again: Where was the Happiness of *Abab*, with all the Delights of a *King of Israel* at his Command; when, upon *Naboth’s* Refusal of his Vineyard, *‘ He came home heavy and displeased, and laid him down upon his Bed, and turned away his Face, and would eat no Bread.* The Truth is, Religion alone can secure a Man from the painful Effects of his own Passions: Where *this* is wanting, ’tis in the Power of every Body about him to ruffle his Temper and interrupt his Enjoyments: He cannot continue a Day in such a World as This is without having his Envy alarmed, his Pride mortified, his selfish Views thwarted, or his Resentment provoked, by something or other that comes in his Way: Hence his Mind is tossed about from one tor-

a Esth. V. 13.

b Kings XXI. 4.

menting Passion to another, nay often distracted by contrary Passions at the same Time. Whereas *a Good Man shall be satisfied from himself*: By the Aid of Divine Grace and the Comforts of Religion, his Satisfaction is placed beyond the Reach of External Casualties. This Divine Philosophy does not indeed pretend to *extirpate* the Passions; but by rectifying their Disorders and regulating their Motions, it renders them even friendly to Happiness. And accordingly, whilst *the Wicked are as the troubled Sea when it cannot rest*; Great Peace have They who love GOD's Law, and Nothing shall offend them.

Let us, however, *suppose* something of this Kind to be the Case also with an *ungodly* Man. Let us suppose him so perfectly acquainted with the Secrets of Luxury, as not only to make his Faculties and their Objects keep-pace with each other, but to keep every disquieting Passion at a due Distance: Yet, whilst he lives ^a *without God in this World*; whilst he ^b *feeds himself without Fear* of His Providence or Sense of His Presence; the Best Part of every Enjoyment is lost to him, and quite escapes his Perception. And accordingly, how natural and how common is it for such Persons, after having long repeated the *same dull*

^a Eph. II. 10.^b Jude 12.

Round, to grow peevish and splenetick and sick of such insipid Courses, and how frequently do we find them at last with the utmost Disgust pronouncing every earthly Delight to be *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*; nay sometimes putting a voluntary Period to a Life so comfortless, without *waiting for their appointed* Dismission from it! — Whereas, the Good Man, He who lives under a prevailing Sense of a superintending Providence, by enlarging his Views, *ennobles* every Satisfaction. He perceives an additional Sweetness in every Gratification resulting from the Consideration that ^a *it is the Gift of God*; and by this means improves each of his Pleasures into an Opportunity of experiencing, ^b *how joyful and pleasant a Thing it is to be thankful*. — So far is Religion from being an Enemy to our Joys, that it chastens and refines, and so in reality heightens and exalts them.

But farther: Is *Freedom from foreboding Cares* and anxious Misgivings necessary to a comfortable Enjoyment of the Good Things of this Life? And where shall we seek for *This* but in the Ways of Godliness? — If the *Atheist*, who *has no Hope* of any invisible Protection, must naturally, and may reasonably, be under continual Apprehensions of some or

^a Eccl. III. 13.^b Psal. CXLVII. 1.

all of those Evils, to which the weak and precarious Condition of his Being every Moment exposes him : What must the Case of That Man be, who is in regard to all the Purposes of Guidance or Comfort *as much without God, tho' not without the Belief of Him !* How must He *tremble* who *only believes !* Believes there is a Being, actuated by impartial Justice and arm'd with uncontrollable Power ; whom at the same Time he finds himself obliged to consider as his irreconcilable Enemy ! How must he be ^a *afraid even* (if that could be supposed) *where no Fear is*, of having (what he calls) his Pleasures torn from him, or himself from them ! and what Relish can he well have for any Enjoyment under such Circumstances ! — Whereas the Man who is conscious, that by the Practice of Virtue and Holiness he secures the Protection and Friendship of *that Being*, who governs and conducts all Events, has a solid Foundation for Confidence and Security, and *needs not fear what Man, or any created Being, can do unto him.* He has engaged that Almighty Power on his Behalf, whom all Nature obeys ; who can turn even Disappointments into Blessings, and make ^b *all Things work together for his Good.* To Him he can securely trust the

^a Psal. LIII. 5.^b Rom. VIII. 28.

Issue of all his Endeavours ; to Him he can unbofom all his Defires ; he can ^a *pour out his Heart before Him* ; ^b *cafting all his Care upon Him*, who (he is well affured) *careth for him*.

Virtue is, in Truth, the Source of all Rational and manly Delight : It is (as it has well been called) ^c *the Health of the Soul, without which none of its Satisfactions can be found or fincere*. The Mind of Man when under the Dominion, and wounded with the Confciousnefs, of Sin, *is in Pain and travaileth*. The Sensualift may employ his Thoughts and Care ^d *in providing for the Flefh, to fulfil the Lufts thereof* : But without Religion no Proviſion can be made for the ſuperiour Part of Man's Being : Without this there muſt unavoidably be an Emptinefs and (in the Pfalmiſt's Expreſſion) ^e *Leannefs in the Soul* ; which can by no means receive Nourifhment from merely ſensual Repaſts, much leſs from criminal Gratifications. And can the Pleaſure of the *Man* be in any degree complete whiſt the *Mind* is wholly unprovided for ! — Whiſt Luſt and Appetite are (as it were) upon the Throne, the Conſtitution within us is in an *Unnatural*, and muſt therefore needs be in an

^a Pſal. LXII. 8. ^b 1 Pet. V. 7.

See alſo Norris Serm. V. 3. S. laſt.

^c Pſal. CVI. 15.

^d Divine Reſtitute.

^e Rom. XIII. 14.

uneasy and disorder'd, State. The Rational Soul is an active Principle: Conscious of its Native Preeminence, it will not fail to make continual Remonstrances against the Usurpers of its just Prerogative; or if it does not, we may conclude it to be in a *Fever* or a *Lethargy*: Diseases so much more dreadful than those we commonly call by these Names, as they threaten us in an infinitely more important and lasting Concern.

To what has been said of Virtue and Godliness *in general* I might add the Mention of several *particular* Virtues and Graces, the *single Exercise* whereof is exquisitely pleasant and delightful; and the *regular Succession* of which in the good Christian's Life is sufficient to make him ^a *Rejoice evermore*. I might enlarge upon the Exercise of *Gratitude* to the Fountain of all Good; that of *Contemplation* on His adorable Perfections; that of *universal Love* to Mankind and Christian *Charity* to our Brethren; that of relieving the distress'd, *comforting the Feeble-minded, supporting the Weak*, in short diffusing Happiness, and doing all the Good Offices in a Man's Power, to the Bodies and Souls of all around him: Conscious, every Moment, how incomparably *more blessed it is to give than to receive*: I might (as the

^a 1 Theff. V. 16.

pious *Psalmist* has done before me) bid You^a *mark the perfect Man and behold the Upright*; and see how all the Paths, and especially how *the End, of That Man, is Peace!* Above all, I might insist on That glorious Prospect of Future Bliss which *Faith* presents to our View, and on which the good Christian's *Hope* may continually dwell. But I forbear. — Those who are already acquainted with the Ways of Godliness, know that its Pleasures are not to be described. And as to those who are not, we can only assure *them*, They will not, at least after the first Struggles and Reluctances of their Conversion are over, They will not repent of having made the Experiment.

Upon the Whole: *Pleasure* is a *Relative* Thing; depending on the *Taste* and *Relish* of the *Person* that receives, as well as on the *Object* or *Action* that *occasions*, it: And accordingly to Men of *different Tastes different Objects* will be *agrecable*; nor is it here deny'd, but that *vicious Actions* may be, and in many Instances are attended with *pleasing Sensations*. It could not indeed well be otherwise in a State of *Tryal*. But then, what we say and insist on, is *This*. The Pleasures of a religious Life are manly, sober, substantial, lasting: Those of Sin are brutal, noisy, transient. The

^a Psal. XXXVII, 37.

Former are always growing upon Experience; the Latter are generally blasted and destroyed by it. The Former are the Result of a due Exercise, a proper Disposition of both sensitive and intellectual Powers; the Latter of a Misapplication and Abuse of *Those*, and utter Inactivity of *These*. The Former result from the Health of the Mind; the Latter are either the Causes or the Effects of a diseased and dangerous Habit of it. But the most important Difference of all is, that the Pleasures of Sin, if not timely exchanged for grievous Repentance and Remorse here, will certainly be succeeded by something *far more dreadful* hereafter: Whereas those pure Streams of Delight which flow from Godliness, shall at our Departure hence be rather *improved* than *altered*; shall open into new and inconceivable Scenes of *⁹ Joy at God's Right-Hand*, and swell into *Rivers of Pleasure for Evermore*.

How favourably is This our State of Probation ordered; wherein our present *Happiness* is not only made *consistent with* our *Duty* but inseparably *united to it*! What Thanks ought we to render to That gracious Being, who has made our Enjoyment of the *most solid* Satisfaction which *this* World affords, a Preparative for the Fruition of *Those unspeakable Joys which*

a Psal. XVI. 11.

He has prepared for us in a far better ! How inexcusable shall we be, if we sacrifice our Ease and truest Comfort here in order to make ourselves Miserable for Ever !

I shall conclude with the affecting Invitation of the Prophet *Isaiah*, which You will easily apply with me to the present Subject, and imagine to be the Words of *Wisdom* herself.—

“ Ho, every one that thirsteth, come Ye to the Waters ; and He that hath no Money, Come Ye, buy and eat ; yea come, buy Wine and Milk without Money, and without Price. Wherefore do Ye spend Money for that which is not Bread ? and Your Labour for that which satisfieth not ? hearken diligently unto ME, and eat Ye that which is good, and let Your Soul delight itself in Fatness. Incline Your Ear and come unto me ; hear and Your Soul shall live ; and I will make an Everlasting Covenant with You, ^b and the Work of Righteousness shall be Peace ; and the Effect of Righteousness, Quietness and Assurance for Ever.

^a *Isai. LV. 1, 2, 3.*

^b *Ibid. XXXII. 17.*

S E R M O N VI.

PROV. IV. 8.

*Exalt Her, and She shall promote Thee :
She shall bring Thee to Honour, when
Thou dost embrace Her.*

THESE Words are Part of an Exhortation or Instruction, which the *Wiseſt of Men* informs us He had Himſelf received from His *illuſtrious*, and then Aged and experienced, *Father*. A Circumſtance which, could we urge no higher Conſideration, muſt needs, of itſelf, recommend the Advice and Encouragement contained in them, to our eſpecial Attention and Obſervance.

Now the *Antecedent*, to which the Words before us refer, is *Wiſdom* : By which (I conceive) we are here, and indeed generally in other Paſſages of this Book, to underſtand, not *barely* an accurate *Knowledge of Things* (though That is, no doubt, very ornamental

and useful) but *Discretion* in ordering one's *Conduct* and Behaviour; more especially That Branch of it, which discovers itself in the Choice of the Noblest End, and the Pursuit of That End by the fittest Means: In other Words, That *Wisdom*, which hath its *Beginning in the Fear of God*, and the *good Understanding* whereof appears in a Life conducted by the Rules of Virtue and Religion. — To *exalt* and *embrace This Wisdom*, is to make it the *Principal Object* of our Esteem and Desires; to prefer it to all the other seeming Advantages of this World; and, in Course, freely to renounce them, and to quit the Pursuit of them, whensoever they stand in Competition with it, or would draw us aside from It. — The *Inducement* here made Use of, addresseth itself to one of the most generous Principles in our Nature; proposing to us a *Reward*, which is of all the merely Temporal Blessings annex'd to a good Life, the most noble and excellent; ** Exalt Wisdom, and She shall promote Thee: She shall bring Thee to Honour, when thou dost embrace Her.*

In order then to enforce the Advice in my Text, and to recommend the Practice of Virtue and Religion to the Choice of every ge-

a Eccl. VII. 1.

nerous Mind ; I shall endeavour to illustrate the *Connection* that is here affirm'd to be between *Virtue* and *Honour*, and to shew that the *Practice* of the *Former* is the *surest* Method that can be taken for the *Attainment* of the *Latter*.

With this View I propose, *First*, To *state* in few Words the *Meaning* of the Assertion here advanced : *Secondly*, To *confirm* more fully the *Truth* of it : And, *Thirdly*, To *deduce* some proper and useful *Inferences* from it.

First then ; In order to prevent any Mistake in Men's Apprehensions of This Matter, and (in consequence of such Mistake) any Error in their Pursuits, or Disappointment of their Expectations ; let it be observed that by *Honour* we do not here mean that *Fame* or *Vain Glory* which consists in the Acclamations of the Populace, and the Applauses of the Multitude. *These* must often be courted by such Methods as a *good* Man cannot, and therefore a *wise* or great Man will not, stoop to the Use of. Accordingly we are justly caution'd against being ^a *desirous* of this Kind of *Glory* ; and our LORD Himself hath intimated, that we are never more in Danger than

a Gal. V. 26.

^a *when all Men speak well of us.* The Arts of Popularity are indeed generally inconsistent with the Precepts of Virtue and Religion. Too tender a Sensibility and ^b *Fearfulness of the Reproaches of Men* must, in such a World as this is, continually betray us into unwarrantable Compliances. They who ^c *love the Praise of Men more than the Praise of God*, must be prepared to desert any unfashionable Truth or Duty, and to fall in with any Follies or Vices which the Customs of a degenerate Age shall recommend to them. — *Such Fame or Glory* then cannot, we may be sure, be the same with That *Honour* which the Text encourages us to promise to Those, that *exalt and embrace Religious Wisdom.* — To proceed then,

Honour is a Term of large Extent, being used in several different Senses. But as far as we are here concern'd with it; as it makes up an Article in Men's Account of Temporal Good, and may be consider'd as one of the *present* Rewards of Virtue and Piety; its Significations may be reduced to these two, *Dignity* and *Reputation*. Where, by *Dignity* we may understand, the Favour of Princes, and Offices of Trust and Titles of Honour consequent thereupon: And by *Reputation*, the

a Luk. VI. 26.

b Isai. LI. 7.

c Joh. XII. 43.

Esteem of Mankind in general, especially the valuable Part of them, and that Commendation and Good-Name which are consequent upon *it*. And to *Both* these Kinds of Honour, at least so far as either of them is *truly desirable*, I doubt not but it may easily be made appear, that a Life conducted by the Rules of Virtue and Religion gives the *only just* Pretensions, and such also as are *most usually*, tho' *not infallibly* successful.

I. To begin with the *Former*: No Pretensions to Promotion and Dignity can be better supported than by Godliness and Integrity. God is the Fountain from whence all true Honour and Authority must be derived; and none can regularly be advanced to a Resemblance of Him in either of these Perfections, but Those who antecedently resemble Him in the other Perfections of Justice, Wisdom, Goodness &c. on which they are founded. Nor does the Case stand thus only upon the foot of *Right* and *Reason*, but also of *Prudence* and *good Policy*. For the Interests of Prince and People cannot surely be entrusted in safer Hands than those of Persons, whose Loyalty and sacred Regard to the one, and whose Benevolence and Fidelity to the other, are grounded on the firm Basis of Religion, and conducted under *the Fear of God*. Every prudent

prudent as well as pious Prince will make those well-known Resolutions of King *David*, recorded in *Pſalm* 101ſt, the Patterns of his own. And, we may preſume alſo, ^a *when ſuch Righteous Perſons are in Authority, the People will have the juſteſt Cauſe to rejoyce.*

We were indeed inform'd ſome Years ago, among other *choice Secrets* communicated to this enlighten'd Age; that *the Vices of private Perſons have a Beneficial Influence upon the Publick Welfare*: And had the Aſſertion been as clearly proved, as it was confidently propoſed; ſome of the *worſt of Men*, might (I ſuppoſe) have expected a *proportionable Share* of the Honours and Promotions of the Community, as being ſome of the *moſt uſeful Members* of it. But, beſides that Aſſertions of this Kind muſt ſuppoſe (what can never be granted) that Divine Providence hath no Concern in the Government of the World; if we conſider this Matter only according to the natural Courſe of Things, we need but deſire You to *imagine* one State to be adminiſtered by ſuch Perſons as *Jethro* recommended to *Moſes*, ^b *able Men, ſuch as fear GOD, Men of Truth, hating Covetouſneſs*; and another to be govern'd by ſuch Magiſtrates as our Bleſſed LORD reſents as ^c *neither fearing GOD nor regarding*

^a Prov. XXIX. 2. ^b Exod. XVIII. 21. Luk. XVIII. 2.
Man.

Man. Do but imagine, I say, two States to be thus differently administer'd, and then tell us, which of the two is most likely *to be prolonged*, and which hath its Honours most deservedly bestow'd.

^a *Righteousness*, especially in Persons of Eminence, and Authority, *exalteth a Nation*. Men of Piety have all the Inducements to a regular Exercise and beneficial Use of the Power they are possess'd of that any other Persons can possibly have; and, over and above, the still stronger Tie of *Conscience*, and the awakening Consideration that they must one Day give an Account of all their Talents before the awful Tribunal of *the King of Kings*. And what should farther most powerfully recommend the Services of such Persons is the *Blessing* of Providence, which usually attends them in *all that they put their Hands unto*, and causes *whatsoever they do to prosper*.

Accordingly, in every regular State of Things, Virtue and Piety are the surest Steps to Promotion and Advancement: ^b *See'st Thou a Man diligent in his Business* (says a Wise Observer of Men and Things) *He shall stand before Kings, he shall not stand before mean Men*. David Himself had very remarkably experienced the Success of the Advice which He

^a Prov. XIV. 34.

^b Ibid. XXII. 29.

gives in my Text; having been by Providence ^a *taken away from the Sheepfolds*, and at length appointed to feed Jacob His People, and Israel His Inheritance. God has indeed in general declared, ^b *that them that honour Him He will honour*: And agreeably to this Declaration, numerous are the Instances, recorded in the Sacred History, of the Providential Advancement of virtuous and Religious Men. But I need produce no other besides the well-known Case of the Patriarch Joseph: In the affecting Narration whereof, You cannot miss of observing, how every Step taken to depress and ruin Him, first by his *envious* Brethren, and after by the disappointed and *enraged Wife* of his Master, contributed to his Exaltation; till at last we find him ^c *raised from the Dungeon to the high Dignity of Governour over all the Land of Egypt*.

It must indeed be own'd, that Cases of this Sort are by no means *constantly* to be expected. The Providence of God usually acts by the Intervention of Second Causes, and agreeably to the Tendencies which Himself hath impress'd upon them. Now, the Man of Virtue and Piety, being *satisfied from himself*, or having nobler Objects in View, may be less

^a Psal. LXXVIII. 70, 71. ^b 1 Sam. II. 30. ^c Psal. CV. 17, 18. &c.

ready to improve favourable Opportunities for his own Advancement than either Virtue or Piety necessarily require him to be: And, 'tis no wonder, if where this is the Case, he should often be *overlook'd* in the Distribution of Honours, even by Those who have very upright Intentions in making it. But, in a more *corrupt* State of Affairs, which must sometimes happen, when *Bad Men* are permitted to *bear Rule*; it is still less to be wonder'd at, if such Men be inclined to postpone Men of Probity, and to draw up others after them of Characters more like their own. And yet even *here*, Recourse is generally had to some *Appearance* of Merit, where the *Reality* is neglected. Nay the very *Epithets*, by which great Men are distinguish'd, are derived from some eminent Virtue or *Complication of Virtues*. So that, in short, where wicked Men are promoted to Eminence and Power, their Vices and Impieties *give the Lye* to their Titles: And we may apply the Declaration of our Blessed LORD to this Case also, *" Verily, I say unto You, He that entereth not in by the Door of real Worth and Usefulness, but climbeth up some other Way, the same is a Thief and a Robber.*

a Joh. X. 1.

2. But

2. But, not to dwell longer upon this Part of my Subject, especially since Honour of *this* Kind can be the *Expectation* of but Few, and the *Possession* of still Fewer; Let us proceed to illustrate the Tendency of Virtue with regard to the *other* Species of *Honour*; which is, or ought to be the Concern of *all* Men to secure; but which however we shall find to be the proper and the *peculiar* Reward of the *Wise* and *Good*.

Reputation, in the very Notion of it, implies something reputable, some real Worth in the Subject of it. 'Tis the Testimony which Mankind are presumed to bear to Merit, and to Merit only. The Applauses of Mankind should be consider'd as *one common Fund* for the Encouragement of Virtue and the Reward of worthy Undertakings; *out of which* every Man should *receive his Portion in due Season*; but which should by no means be squander'd away or misemploy'd. A Good Name without Good Qualities to support it, is such an Incongruity in the Moral World as no Irregularity in the Natural bears any Analogy or Resemblance to.

We are indeed commanded by an Apostle to *honour all Men*. But if we take the Precept in its most unlimited Extent, 'tis plain

from the Nature of the Thing that *that* Honour which is to be paid to *all Men*, cannot be the same with This which we are now considering; inasmuch as *This*, being proposed as a *Reward*, evidently supposes in the Person receiving it some Superiority over, some Reference to others; whereas what is given *alike to all* cannot imply a *Preference of any*. The Precept, in Truth, seems to require no more than this; that we should treat *Human Nature* with some Degree of *Respect* wheresoever we meet with it; that we should look upon every Man's Good-Name as his valuable Property, and not wantonly disturb any one in the Possession of it. But then Men's Reputations are not hereby declared to be *unalienable* Properties, or such as no Misdemeanour shall subject to a Forfeiture. We are to hope well of every Man till we find Cause to the contrary; and to look upon all Men, *as such*, as intitled to a *respectful* Treatment. But in Persons no more than in Things are we allow'd, much less required, ^a *to call Evil Good*; or to give Credit and Commendation to Those who neither have nor deserve to have Any.

And as thus it *ought* to be in *Reason*, so thus it is generally *found* to be in *Fact* and *Experience*. A Vicious Man may be Rich or

^a Isai. V. 20.

Powerful ; but truly honour'd he hardly can be. The Good despise, or at the best pity him ; and the Bad, were they disposed (as They rarely are) have scarce ever the Hardiness to appear in his Defence, or however not in his Commendation. The Truth is, Reputation fits so awkwardly upon an immoral Man, that no Commendation can give any real Credit to him : It may *expose* such an Owner, but cannot *adorn* him.

On the other Hand, Bad as the World is, it is generally very just to the upright in this respect. Besides the Promise of God in favour of them *that honour Him* ; Men's Natural Sentiments of Good and Evil are sufficient for the most Part to ensure to every truly Good Man the Esteem and Commendation of those about him. A *Good Man* is a venerable, a great, Character. A steady Uprightness, a *Conversation becoming, the Gospel of CHRIST*, commands the Veneration of all that come within the Sphere of its Activity, with an almost-irresistible Authority. Even after his Departure hence the Memory of the Just Man shall be Blessed, and his valuable Qualities and worthy Deeds shall be had in Everlasting Remembrance. * *The Righteous Man is more*

a Prov. XII. 26.

excellent

excellent than his Neighbour, even his Enemies themselves being Judges.

For otherwise, whence comes it that those very Persons who will not be at the Trouble (as they are pleased to imagine it) of *becoming really* Virtuous or Godly, are content to take so much Pains as They often do, to *appear* such. Is it not because They know very well, that Reputation is the proper Inheritance of Virtue, even in the Intention of the Donors; and at the same Time hope to come in for a Share by putting off the *Semblance* of it *instead* of the *Reality*? — And what if such Persons do sometimes succeed in their fraudulent Attempt upon the Good Man's Property? Does this prove that any Thing short of a real Character of Goodness is, either in itself, or in the Opinion of Mankind, a just Recommendation to Honour and Esteem? Nothing like it. Such Instances prove only the Shortness of Human Discernment, which cannot *see the Heart*, nor always distinguish real Worth from false Pretences to it.

And yet, thus much may be said even in this Case; that real Virtue is not only a more honourable and even more easy Method of attaining, but a far more safe Method of preserving a fair Character, than the Counterfeit Show of it. To be *acting a Part* for a
Man's

Man's *whole* Life must, methinks, be extremely difficult, if not impossible. *Hypocrisy* is Violence, and *nothing Violent can naturally be lasting*. The Truth is, *Honour* itself hath a Tendency to strip Men of their Disguises, and to expose their Tempers. ^a *Man being in Possession of Honour hath generally less Understanding, less Caution about him, than when only in Pursuit of it*: He has now compassed the End of all his Reservedness and Slavery; and it is Time surely to take a little Freedom, to throw of the Mask, and to act in his own proper Character. And we need not doubt but there will always be Eyes enough upon the Man of Reputation to make the Discovery; always Spirit, or Malice, or Envy enough to proclaim it. And when this is done, the *Hypocrite's* Pretensions are at an End. Men will hardly suffer themselves to be imposed on *twice* by the same Person. Nay should he become a *sincere* Convert to Godliness, his Conversion will only be *thought* a fresh Attempt upon Men's Understandings, and will be placed to the same Account with his former Colusions. His Infamy is for Life; and generally the Stain of it is deeper in Proportion to the Brightness of that Reputation, of which he before was unjustly possessed.

^a Psal. XLIX. 20.

But the Honour attending upon a *real* Character of Virtue and Piety is of a more lasting Nature. A Good Man can always appear with his *own natural* Face. His Goodness, being *unaffected*, fits *easy* upon Him; and he needs not, in every Step he takes, be apprehensive lest his Mask should drop off, and his foul Visage be exposed to View. The Mark he aims at is always the same: He has therefore no Occasion to be perpetually shifting or doubling: A graceful Evenness, a beautiful Consistence, appears in his Character which on this Account can scarce fail of conciliating the Esteem and Admiration of every judicious Beholder. And (which is most considerable) if such a Character should for a Time be clouded and obscured by the Misrepresentations of envious and malicious Men; yet the Good Man's Innocence soon clears up; ^a *His Righteousness shines forth as the Light, and His Just-Dealing as the Noon-Day.*

Be it, however, remember'd, that I have here been representing only the usual and *general Tendency*, not the constant and *invariable Course*, of Things. For after all that has been said, we must expect to meet with *some Exceptions*, even in this Case also. — It must be own'd, that Good Men themselves *are not*

^a Psal. XXXVII. 6.

always so careful to maintain the favourable Opinion of others as they really *should be*: Attending chiefly, or rather solely, to the Approbation of their own Consciences and of the great Searcher of Hearts, they may unawares expose themselves to the Censures of those about them, and by degrees suffer in their Reputations. But, as neither Virtue nor Religion require any such *Indifference*, whatever Misunderstanding may be consequent thereupon, should be charged not to their *Godliness* but to their *Indiscretion*. And, what if the Good Man should sometimes, even *on the Account* of his superiour Goodness, be misrepresented by the Malicious, and (in consequence of That) defamed by the unwary, and so, either through Mistake or Design, evil-spoken of by all: 'Tis plain, this is not to be ascribed to his Virtue *as such*, but to the Malice of some and the Shortightedness of others. Virtue, though it may be the *real* Cause of some Men's Slanders, will *never be publickly assigned* as such. No Slanderer ever yet was so hardy, or understood so very little of human Nature, as to make any Man's superiour *Merit* appear as an Article in his *Accusation*.

Upon the Whole: The Practice of Virtue and Piety gives the *only just Pretensions* to Honour and Reputation; and is the most
compen-

compendious and easy, and only-not-infallible *Road* to it. Room there always will be for Failures even in *this* particular, so long as all Men are *free*, and among them some *weak* and others *wicked*. But thus much we can affirm, that when Good Men are disgraced and Bad Men honoured, generally speaking the One are *mistaken* for the other. And it is certainly a sufficient Proof of the Beneficial Tendency of Virtue, that whenever it *appears* *such* it cannot fail of Honour; and that Vice must first counterfeit its *Title* before it can obtain its *Inheritance*.

From what has occurred to us in the foregoing Reflections it is obvious to infer,

1. The *Vanity* of that Notion which would represent all Regard for Reputation as unworthy of a Wise and unbecoming a Good Man.

Men's Concern for the Good Opinion, and Fondness for the Applauses of Those about them, no-doubt, may be, and too often is, carried too far: They may eagerly pursue the Praises of *Persons incapable* of conferring any real Honour; or they may desire the Reputation of *trivial Accomplishments*; or their Desire of Fame and Popularity may exert itself in *Ways dishonourable* and *criminal*: And in any of these or the like Cases, Regard to, especially *Solicitude about*, the Commendations

of others, is irregular in itself, and highly dangerous to Men's Virtue. And *if we thus please Men, we shall not be the Servants of CHRIST.*

But surely the Esteem of *wise and good* Men must deserve no small Regard; and the Desire of it, when duly regulated, must be not only allowable but commendable. To say otherwise must be to contradict the common Sense of Mankind, and the declared Sentiments of the wisest Men in all Ages. Or, could any Doubt remain about the Reason of the Thing, our Blessed LORD has for us *Christians* fully decided this Point. An *ostentatious* Performance of *private* Duties in order ^a *to be seen and admired* ^b *of Men*, He has indeed condemned. Not so in respect to Duties of a *publick* Nature. There, says He, ^c *let Your Light so shine before Men that they may see Your good Works, and glorify Your Father who is in Heaven.* With the same View St. Paul tells us He was solicitous to ^d *provide Things honest, καλὰ, Things of graceful Appearance, not only in the Sight of the LORD but also in the Sight of Men.* And how greatly a virtuous Principle must ever be assisted by a due Regard to the Esteem of others, He has suffi-

^a Matt. VI. 1, &c. ^b Ibid. XXIII. 3, 5. ^c Ibid. V. 16.
^d 2 Cor. VIII. 21.

ciently intimated in that well-known Recommendation of ^a *whatsoever Things are lovely and of good Report*, and that beautiful Exhortation *if there be any Praise to think on these Things*. And this leads me to infer,

2. *The Iniquity of misapplying This Reward, by either withholding it from Good Men, or conferring it on Persons of a contrary Character.*

The *Psalmist* justly makes it one Ingredient in his Upright Man's Character, that He ^b *honoureth them that fear the LORD*: And, with equal Justice, ^c *Despisers of Those that are Good* are by St. Paul reckon'd up among the most profligate of the human Species. And surely, there cannot well be conceived a more base and ungenerous Turn of Mind than that which exerts itself in defaming and *calumniating Good Men* really, though not professedly, on the very Account of their *being such*. There is scarcely any Practice against which so severe Penalties, or with so much Frequency, are denounced in the inspired Writings, as against *Slander and Detraction* in general. But, if we are enjoined, as we expressly are, ^d *to speak Evil of no Man*, i. e. not unjustly or even unnecessarily to asperse any Man or take from the Reputation He is possess'd of; sure-

^a Phil. IV. 8.

^b Psal. XV. 4.

^c 2 Tim. III. 3.

^d Tit. III. 2.

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a Phil. IV. 8.

b Psal. XV. 4.

c 2 Tim. III. 3.

d Tit. III. 2.

ly to speak Evil of *Good Men*, and enviously or even wantonly to vilify worthy Characters, must be *exceeding sinful*.

And yet, I know not, whether is more injurious to the Cause of Virtue, to deny ^a *Honour to whom Honour is due* in some Instances, or to render Honour in *general* scarce worth desiring or enjoying by throwing down all Inclosures about it, and leaving it *in common*. If this is not denying the Good Man his Due, or in Strictness *depriving* him of his *Property*, it is however, (which amounts to the *same Thing*) quite *reducing* the *Price* and *destroying* the *Worth* of it. For nothing is plainer than that Praise and Good-Report must cease to be valuable *in proportion* as they are *indiscriminately* bestow'd. In short, Commendations misplaced are not injurious to Virtue, but directly repugnant to *His Will*, who has declared that ^b *they who despise Him shall be lightly esteem'd*: And we see the Reasons of That generous Resolution of *Elibu*, ^c *I know not to give flattering Titles; in so doing my Maker would soon take me away*.—To proceed. From the foregoing Reflections it may not be improper or without its Use, to infer,

3. The *Danger of forfeiting*, and the *Importance of preserving a fair Character when*

^a Rom. XIII. 7.

^b 1 Jam. II. 30.

^c Job XXXII. 22.
establish'd;

establiſh'd; and the Neceſſity of Care and Vigilance for that End.

It is an Obſervation of the *Wiſe Preacher* highly deſerving of every good Man's Attention; that, as *a dead Flies cauſe the Ointment of the Apothecary to ſend forth a ſtinking Savour*; ſo doth a little Folly him that is in Reputation for Wiſdom and Honour. The Truth is, whatever Allowances, in our preſent State of Imperfection and Frailty, ſhould in Reaſon be made, very ſparing ones will in Fact generally be made, for the Failings, but eſpecially the Sins, of Men eminent for Virtue and Piety: And, which renders ſuch Caſes ſtill more to be lamented, They are too often found not only to wound deeply the Characters of Perſons otherwiſe excellent, but to prejudice the Interests of Virtue and Piety itſelf. If the *Man after God's own Heart* is ſurprized into the heinous Sins of *Adultery* and *Murder*, notwithstanding his Repentance, He ^b gives Occaſion to the Enemies of the LORD to blaſpheme. If a Man of *Peter's Zeal* and ſeeming Conſtancy is yet in the Article of Danger ſo weak as to *deny* and *abjure His Maſter*; the Example is too powerful to be withſtood by his Brethren, nor muſt we, won-

a Eccl. X. 1.

b 2 Sam. XII. 14.

der that ^a *they all forsook Him and fled*. From such unhappy Instances Bad Men receive Joy and Comfort in their Vices, flattering themselves, that all Pretences to Piety in others are only solemn Grimace and Hypocrisy; and that, however Appearances may be against them, They are not in Reality worse Men than their Neighbours: Whilst Good Men however unwilling rashly to quit the favourable Opinion They have entertain'd of others, are inwardly out of Countenance and grieved at such Occasions of Reproach, perhaps ready to ^b *say in their Haste, "All Men are Liars;"* nay strongly tempted to *fall from their own Steadfastness*.

And, if such melancholy Deviations from Duty in Men otherwise least chargeable with them, furnish Matter of Rejoicing to Men of a contrary Character, and Matter of real Concern and Grief to all pious Observers; how strongly should they recommend Caution and Circumspection to the Best of Men! how careful should Men of superiour Reputation and establish'd Characters be, not to *let their Good be evil-spoken of*, on Account of any *real* Misconduct, or even (as far as can be avoided) any *Appearance of Evil!* and how con-

^a Matt. XXVI. 56.

^b Psal. CXVI. 11.

stantly

stantly should every *such* Person *especially* address the great Preventer of Sin and Guardian of Innocence, in the devout Psalmist's Words and according to their utmost Latitude of Application; ** Set a Watch, O LORD, before my Mouth, and keep the Door of my Lips. Oh, let me not, be inclined to any evil Thing: Let me not be occupied in ungodly Works with the Men that work Wickedness; lest I eat of such Things as please them.* But I hasten to infer, what is most obviously suggested by all that has been said: Namely,

4. and Lastly, *The right Way to Promotion and Esteem*, and the great Prudence and Propriety of directing Your Ambition accordingly.

Seekest Thou great Things then for thyself? Art Thou desirous of being advanced to a Situation of Eminence and Dignity? or wouldst Thou be promoted to great Honour? ^b Exalt Wisdom and She shall promote Thee; She shall bring Thee to Honour when Thou dost embrace Her: She shall give to thine Head an Ornament of Grace, and great Glory shall She deliver to Thee. 'Tis true, these and the like Expressions must be understood as declarative only of the *natural* and usual *Tendency*, not of

^a Psal. CXLI. 3, 4.

^b Prov. IY. 8, 9.

any necessary and *never-failing Effects* of *Wisdom* and *Godliness*. For in this Case also ^a *the Race is not always to the Swift, nor Favour to Men of Skill*: Nay sometimes, *the Fear of the LORD* and a steady Adherence to His Service may ^b *keep Men back from Honour*. But 'tis nevertheless certain, that *Virtue and Piety* are the *best Preparatives* for, the *brigbest Ornaments* of, an exalted Station; and in Case of Disappointment, the completest *Equivalents* for the Want of it. *Without These*, no Station can be truly honourable; and *with These*, though You may not enjoy pompous Titles or large Revenues, yet (which is far more desirable) You will ^c *possess Your Souls*.

Or — Is Your Ambition more *contracted*? Content to move in a lower Sphere, are You solicitous however (as most commendably You may) to preserve a *fair* and unblemish'd *Reputation*? To be esteem'd and well-spoken of while living, and mention'd with Advantage by those that come after You? In this Respect also, ^d *Wisdom, Religious Wisdom, is the Principal Thing; Wherefore get Wisdom; and with all Thy getting get Understanding*. In vain shall Ye seek for Honour, *substantial* and

^a Eccl. IX. 11. ^b Numb. XXIV. 11. ^c Luk. XXI. 19.
^d Prov. IV. 7.

lasting Honour, in any Way but that of Virtue and Godliness. Other Methods there may be of conciliating the Acclamations of the unthinking Many, and perhaps also of imposing upon the more discerning Few. But then such Vain-Glory (for Reputation I cannot call it) is but a Vapour that appeareth for a little Time; and is, at its best Estate, utterly unworthy of the Solitude of a Rational Being. ^aThe Honour which cometh from GOD, valuable in itself, and valuable for its Duration, must be sought for only, because it can only be found, in His Service: And — ^bsuch Honour have all His Saints.

To conclude. We are all of us in our Passage through a vain transitory World; all profess to *seek a better Country, that is an heavenly*: And our *social* Natures render it very agreeable, nay our present Circumstances make it on many Accounts highly expedient for us, to enjoy the Favour and good Opinion of our Fellow-Travellers *by the Way*: And accordingly, Divine Goodness has so order'd Matters, that the same Conduct which is made previously necessary to our Arrival at the *Former*, is in the mean while our *most promising Method* for securing the *Latter*. Let us

^a Joh. V. 44.^b Psal. CXLIX. 9.

however

however constantly bear in Mind, that the present is but a very *uncertain* State of Things; in which *One Way* there is, and *but One Way*, of guarding against Disappointments, and ensuring our Success; and that is, always to *look forward* to that important Period, when ^a *every Man shall*, in exact Proportion to his real Deservings, *have Praise of God*. — *An adulterous and sinful Generation* may at present so far prevail against the Wise and Good, as to get the Reputations of *Persons*, and even the very *Notions* of *Things*, misapply'd and confounded. But there is a *Day* approaching, when our Characters shall be under Consideration of an *impartial, unerring* Judge; whose Declaration in our Favour will do us infinitely more *Honour*, than all the Praises that the Greatest among Men can bestow. When the Blessed Jesus ^b *shall come in His own Glory and in His Father's, and of the Holy Angels*; to be called forth and acknowledged by Him in That *august Assembly*, will be a Distinction far surpassing our present Conceptions. — If, *consistently* with our Pretensions to *This*, we can recommend ourselves to the Good-Will and Esteem of our Fellow-Creatures here, all is well. Let us

a 1 Cor. IV. 5.

b Luk. IX. 26.

however

however take Care, that our Concern for any Thing of this Kind be an *Help* and *Encouragement*, not a *Snare* or an *Hindrance* to us in this our principal Pursuit. — In a Word ; May our Ambition then only know *no Bounds*, when the Honour it aspires after is *infinitely valuable* ! May we on no Account forfeit our Pretensions to that most significant of all Applauses, — ^a *Well done, Good and faithful Servant* ! — *Enter Thou into the Joy of Thy LORD* !

a Matt. XXV. 23.

S E R M O N VII.

PHILIP. IV. I.

*Therefore, my Brethren, dearly Beloved
and longed for, my Joy and Crown;
So stand fast in the LORD, my dearly
Beloved.*

IF, in the present Circle of *Vanity*, there *can be* an Enquiry of more than ordinary Concernment to Us, It must be *This*, — “What is to become of us after our “Departure out of it?” *We see with our own Eyes daily Examples, and our Fathers have told us infinitely more, of the bounded Extent of human Life: So that, upon Notice received of any fresh Instance of Mortality, we can hardly miss of the striking, though familiar, Reflection, that* ^a*Every Man, we ourselves in our Turn, shall as certainly draw after him that is gone, as there have been innumerable before him.* But—must these *Bodies* of our’s, then,

^a Job XXI. 33.

which

which will so soon ^a *be brought to the Grave,*
 for Ever *remain in the Tomb?* Must all our
Thoughts also utterly *perish* with them; and
 our *Whole Being* from thenceforward be *ex-*
tinguished, irretrievably lost in *absolute Insensibility?*
 May not these *decay'd Fabricks* be once more
rais'd, once more *animated* by that *Thinking*
Thing within us, which at present *actuates*
 the *whole Man?*—And, if so, *Into what Con-*
dition will this Re-union *finally* introduce us?
 Shall our Bodies and Souls then again *come to-*
gether for the Better or for the Worse?

Now to these and the like *interesting Ques-*
tions, the Passage immediately preceding the
 Exhortation in my *Text* enables us to give
 ourselves a *satisfactory Answer*. And, in or-
 der to discover the Scope of the Words I have
 chosen, and to justify the Application of them
 at present intended, it may be proper to ob-
 serve, that our *Apostle* had just before been
 strenuously asserting *the Excellency of the Know-*
ledge of CHRIST Jesus: This He had exem-
 plify'd in *Three* eminent Instances:—*Justifi-*
cation and Acceptance with GOD through the
 Merits of a Redeemer, (here call'd, ^b *the Righ-*
teousness which is by Faith of Jesus CHRIST :)
The Power of His Resurrection to confirm This
 and all other Benefits of His Gospel: And

^a Job XXI. 32.^b Phil. III. 9, 10.

particularly, the *Prospect* thereby opened to His faithful Followers of ^a *attaining*, after His Likeness, to the *Resurrection of the Dead*. Which last the *Apostle* contents not Himself with barely mentioning; but, after ^b describing in most expressive Language the Pains He took to secure so glorious a *Prize*, He proposes to His beloved ^c *Philippians* his own *Example*, and endeavours to animate *them* with the same Views. ^d *For*, says He, *our Conversation* (or, as some render the Word Πολίτευμα, our Citizenship, the Settlement to which as Christians we are entitled) *is in Heaven*; *From whence also We look for the Saviour, the LORD Jesus CHRIST*: ^e *Who shall change our vile Body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious Body*; according to the mighty *Working*, whereby He is able even to subdue all Things unto Himself. After which He directly subjoins the Exhortation before us, addressed in Terms so ^f *endearing*, and breathing a Spirit of so much *Tenderness* and *Affection*, as can only be felt, not described or illustrated.

My Text, You see, is an *immediate Inference* from Three great Doctrines of Christianity,—*The Redemption of Mankind by the Death of CHRIST*: — *The Power of His Resurrection*:

^a Phil. III. 11. ^b Ibid. 13, 14. ^c Ibid. 17. ^d Ibid. 20.
^e Ibid. 21. ^f Chap. IV. 1.

—And especially, the *Expectation* thence arising to good Christians of a joyful Change of their frail and mortal Bodies into a Conformity with Him in *Bliss and Glory*: Doctrines of such unspeakable Moment, that, for the more solemn Contemplation of them, the Wisdom of our Church annually sets apart a *particular Season*; to which We of *this Place* have lately been paying a *distinguished Regard*. And, as I may well suppose the *direct Proofs* of the Doctrines to be, by this Means, now fresh upon Your Minds; You will permit me to employ the Time, at present allowed us, in enforcing the *Conclusion* our Apostle here deduceth from them.—*Therefore, my Brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my Joy and Crown; So stand fast in the LORD, my dearly Beloved.*

To *stand fast in the LORD* is, I conceive, to be steady and unshaken in professing the Faith and practising the Duties of that Religion, of which our LORD was the Author. **The Enemies of the Cross of CHRIST*, against whose *Examples* and *Insinuations* St. Paul seems here principally guarding his *Philippian* Converts, were probably such as, from *sensual* and *earthly-minded* Motives, endeavour'd to carry them back to the Observances of the *Mosaick* Institution. The Caution, however, in the

^a Compare Phil. III. 3—7. with 18.

Reason of it, reaches to all *other* Cases of like Danger. *Steadfastness* in our Holy Religion may still be properly recommended in Opposition to *any* Attempts to draw Men off from the Profession, or to weaken the Influences of It; whether made under a Pretence of providing sufficiently for their *Justification* and *Salvation* under the *Elements of Judaism*, or under a yet *more imperfect* Dispensation, that of *unassisted Nature*. And You need not be told, how many Attempts have, in this Age of Refinement both in Thinking and Living, been made among us in this *latter Way*. What the Success of such Attempts may have been, it is not perhaps easy to say with any Exactness. The Number of *settled Disbelievers* of the *Gospel-Revelation* is probably not near so considerable as the Noise and Confidence of *vain Talkers* against It would tempt one to imagine. But if, from hearing the Credit of *Revealed Religion* boldly *question'd*, They, who will not be at the Pains of *examining* the Merit of Its Pretensions, begin to consider it as a Point *really doubtful*; or if, from being flattered into an high Conceit of their *own Understandings*, Men have too generally contracted low Notions of *the Light* of the Gospel, as of Something, which, *if* it *may* with no great Trouble be retain'd, may *however* without much

much Loss be at any Time parted with : — The Work of Infidelity must be, in a great Measure, done. And I wish the Times we live in gave less Cause to observe, that some of the worst Purposes of Infidelity itself may be as effectually served by Men's *Indifference about* our Holy Religion, as by their *Apostasy from It*.

I shall therefore, in the following Discourse, apply the Exhortation in my Text to the recommending of *Steadfastness in our Christian Profession*. And, in order to do this more agreeably to the Design of the inspired Author, and more suitably to the Meditations in which we have lately been engaged, I would endeavour to represent to You,

I. The *Excellency of Christian Knowledge* in regard to the Doctrines of *Redemption* and a *Future State*. And,

II. The *Influence* this Consideration ought to have toward engaging us to *stand fast in the LORD*.

I. That the Two great Articles, of *Man's Redemption by the Death of CHRIST*, and of the Prospect of a *happy Immortality* open'd to all good Christians *by His Resurrection from the Dead*, are true, I may be allow'd on this
Occasion

Occasion to take for granted. And, supposing these Doctrines to be true, They are certainly Truths, concerning which it must be of the *utmost Consequence* to us all, to have some clear Discovery, some well-grounded Assurance. Let us then enquire, as distinctly as our present Situation will permit us to enquire, What Assurances we could otherwise have obtain'd, what Discoveries we could probably have made, in these Particulars, *without This Knowledge of CHRIST Jesus*; and we shall, I believe, want no farther Illustration of Its Excellency or Importance.

To begin with the *Former*. — The Advocates for the *Sufficiency of the Light of Nature* will, I suppose, allow, that It is able to discover to Mankind a *Law*, sufficient to *oblige*, and, if transgressed, to *condemn*: The Consequence of which Condemnation must be the *Displeasure* of the *Lawgiver*, with some such *Effects* of it as may properly vindicate the *Honour* of His *Law*, and *support* His *Authority*. — If now *any one* among the Sons of Men can think himself absolutely *without Sin* against this Law, *he* may consistently refer *his Cause* to Its Decision. But, alas! the *best of us* must find himself, in some Instance or other, *condemned* by It. And, “how the same
“ Law that *condemns* should also *acquit* us,”
They

They, who would persuade us to stand or fall by Its Sentence, must be concern'd to explain. Thus much, indeed, They should do, *previously* to any of their Arguments for a *Future State*: Because, otherwise, the more convincing Those Arguments might be, the less comfortable must be *our Prospect*; unless They could also remove our *Fears*, lest That State should prove a State of *Pain* and *Torment*, instead of *Ease* and *Enjoyment* to us. — This Point therefore may deserve to be a little farther considered.

Now, upon a View of the Case just supposed, there arise such Questions as *These*: — “Is it *possible* for *Guilty Man* to recover the “Divine Favour, or even to escape the Effects “of Divine Displeasure, by *Any Means*?” — And, if by Any, “By *what Means*?” — *What*, then, *saieth the Answer of Reason* to these Enquiries?

“Whether the LORD *of the Universe* would “on *any Terms* admit His *rebellious Creatures* “to Favour?” seems a Question, towards the Solution whereof *Nature* could probably have gone but a *little Way*; perhaps no farther than to have asked another, “*Who can tell, whether GOD may not turn away from His Anger, that we perish not?*” — That *there is*

a Jon. III. 9.

Forgive-

Forgiveness with God, we learn from our Infancy; and, *not conscious* when we *first imbibed* this comfortable Notion, we are apt to consider it as *born with us*. But from the Beginning it was not so. In the Behaviour of the ^a*First Transgressors* we discover no such Confidence, or even Hopes, of Reconciliation: Instead of making any *Overtures* to their offended Creator, we find them attempting to *hide themselves from His Presence*, as in Dread of approaching It. And if, from whatever Cause, *more encouraging Sentiments* of God's Mercy are become *familiar to us* their Descendants; if we, *wholly* attending to an Attribute we so much stand in Need of, easily resolve all our Doubts on the *favourable Side*: Yet, surely, *Right Reason* would teach us to consider *Mercy* in an *All-perfect Being*, not as a blind, *undirected*, Affection, but as regularly conducted by His *Wisdom*; and would restrain us from pronouncing, *What Divine Wisdom must direct*, in the Case before us, 'till our *finite Capacities* should *fully* comprehend all Those Views, from whence *infinite Wisdom* may take Its Measures.

Be it, however, for the present *supposed*, not only that God is *willing* to be reconciled to Sinners, but that *This* is one of those Par-

^a Gen. III. 8, 10.

ticulars, which, without any Declaration from Himself, *may be known of God*: Still it would remain to be resolved, *how*, or *in what Way*, such Reconciliation should, on *Man's Part*, be attempted. For, that some *special Method* should be attempted, that *Something particular* should be done, for that Purpose, could, I suppose, admit of no Doubt. Reason, surely, must without Hesitation pronounce, that a *Moral Governour of Intelligent Agents* will make so much Distinction at least between those who *have* observed, and those who *have* transgressed, His Laws, as not *immediately* to treat *Both* upon the *same* Terms, or to admit the *Latter* to the *same Favour* with the *Former*. To presume that a *bare Cessation* from *Doing Evil* must *presently* remove all the Consequences of *Evil Done*, is to confound, and so to destroy, the Notions of *Innocence* and *Guilt* with regard to *past* Actions, that is, as to the Point now before us, with regard to *all* Actions whatsoever.—A Conclusion, with which I would hope every *considering* Person may be safely trusted; at least till the Patrons of Infidelity shall think proper more *directly* to avow and defend it.

Wherewith then shall the Sinner come before the LORD? The Answer, I suppose, must be,
either,

either, With some *costly Oblation*; or, With *Repentance and Amendment of Life*.

As to the *Former*: If perhaps we might, in the Midst of our Uncertainties, conjecture, that *some Part* of our *Substance*, the *Fruits* of the *Ground* for instance, would be favourably accepted by Almighty God, as an Acknowledgment of our Dependence upon Him, both for the Acquisition and the continued Possession of every Thing we have: Yet, even *here*, 'tis obvious to observe, that every Argument for the Propriety of such an Acknowledgment would plead as strongly for its Propriety in a State of *Innocence* as in a State of *Guilt*; and a very little Reflection would tell us, that what is *no more* than a *proper Tribute* from an *innocent* Creature can never be a *sufficient Attone-ment* for a *guilty* one. But as to those *Oblations*, which have usually been accounted the most properly *Expiatory*, those I mean, where Blood is shed and Life taken away; perhaps we could not certainly know, that these are so much as *lawful*; and 'tis plain, whilst there remain'd any Doubt that such Sacrifices *might encrease*, there could be no Assurance that they *would remove*, our Guilt. However This be, there appears no *natural* Connection between * *Shedding the Blood of Bulls or of Goats*

a Heb. X. 4.

and the *Taking away of Sin*. Reason might indeed inform an *Heathen*, that the LORD of the Universe is *at Liberty* to annex His Favours to what Observances He pleaseth ; and *Revelation* informs us *Christians*, that for wise Ends He *once did* annex His Favour to such Observances as we are here speaking of. But, *without* some such *special Appointment*, if Reason had ever thought of, It could hardly have placed any Confidence in, such a Method of propitiating a Just and Holy God, as could neither make a Recompence to the Party offended, nor *purge the Conscience* of the Offender.

Should *this* Expedient then be quitted, as indeed it generally is, with Contempt enough, by our late Masters of Reason, (though, by the way, their Fore-Fathers of old seemed not aware of any such Impropriety in it :) Should Recourse be had to the other Method, that of *Repentance* and *Amendment* ; *This*, we readily own, is in the Accounts of *Right Reason*, the *most promising* Method for recovering the Divine Favour ; and *We Christians* are taught to expect *infallible Success* in the Use of it. But, when once we set aside *the Covenants of Promise*, all Assurances, even from *this Expedient*, vanish, and several material Difficulties presently offer themselves to a thoughtful Mind.

Repen-

Repentance itself is, in a State of *mere Nature*, no such easy Thing as is too often imagined. St. Paul represents Persons under the Dominion of Sin as being, in general, ^a *without Strength*, unable to go through with, or so much as to attempt, their own Reformation; and as being, in many Instances, ^b *past Feeling*, insensible of Danger, and in Course, regardless of any Means of avoiding it: And, the more we consider this Matter, the more *just* such Representations will appear to be. It seems easy in Theory, and to those who only *talk* of it, to ^c *cease to do Evil, and to do the contrary*: But in Fact the Case is quite otherwise. Sin is, both naturally and judicially, of an infatuating Tendency. Even the *single Acts* of it are, we see, generally palliated, not seldom justify'd, instead of being confessed and lamented. But, where Sin is become *habitual* and almost constitutional, to *Repent* is to become, in a more than figurative Sense, *a new Creature*: 'Tis to have a Change wrought in the *whole Frame* of the *Soul*: 'Tis, in regard to our *Wills*, to have a Tendency of Evil removed, and (which is more) succeeded by a Tendency of Good: 'Tis to have the Taste and Relish of our *Affections* intirely altered, and (in the significant Language of the *Apos-*

^a Rom. V. 6.^b Eph. IV. 19.^c Tindal.

tle) to ^a be renewed in the Spirit of our Mind. And, "how our *Affections* should, *themselves*, "begin this Renovation:" Or, "how our *Wills* "should be the *First Movers* towards That "Good, from which they are, by the Suppo- "sition, *habitually averse*:" Are *Problems* not easily resolvable by the *Natural Man*.

Let us, however, *suppose* this Obstruction, great as it is, to be happily removed: Yet what Security can mere Nature give, that *Repentance*, where real, shall also be *lasting*? Or, what must be done in Case of a *Relapse*? It will be said, and that is indeed the Best that can be said, "Repentance must be *repeated*." But, what Assurance can we have, that our Pardon will be renewed as oft as *our Backslidings are multiply'd*? Will a God of Purity and Holiness suffer His Creatures to go on in a *Round* of Sinning and Repenting and Sinning again; still receiving them into Favour upon *every fresh* Application to His Mercy? This, surely, is a Question, to which *Reason Itself*, whilst unacquainted with any *standing Vindication* of the Honour of God's Law, must give a *Negative* Answer. To give it any other Answer, would be to ascribe to the Judge of all the Earth such a Kind of

^a Eph. IV. 23.

Mercy as we should call *Weakness* at least in a *Man* like Ourselves.

That therefore we may put the Case as *favourably* for the *Penitent* as is possible ; We will suppose the Difficulties of Repentance to be surmounted, and the subsequent Reformation to be in the main *uniform* and lasting. Yet what does *even This* amount to ? Why, to *Sorrow* for what is past, and *better Conduct* for the Future. Now a Man's *Sorrow* for *having done* Wrong will not, I suppose, of *itself* undo all the Wrong he *has* done. And as to any succeeding *Good Behaviour* ; *This* would have been his *Duty* had he never offended. But, can the Performance only of *this Day's Task* discharge an Arrear contracted by many *past Failures* ? Can his *Beginning to do That Now*, which he ought to have *always been* doing, presently put him in the same Situation as if he *always had* been doing it ? Or (to bring the Supposition nearer to Fact) Can the Payment of such an Obedience as at best *falls short* of answering the *present Demands* of Duty, have *Merit* sufficient to *make up*, not only its own but all former Deficiencies, and (which is yet more) to *counterbalance* the Guilt of many *actual Violations* of the Divine Law ? — All This indeed the Adversaries of Reveal'd Religion generally think
fit

fit to *take for Granted*. But, surely, it would be *no Disadvantage* to their Cause, were such *Presumptions* less necessary to support It.

After all: The *best Thing* the Sinner can at any Time resolve upon is, to *Repent* and *Amend*. Thus much *Reason* may be allowed to dictate. And, supposing such *Repentance sincere*, and such *Amendment lasting*, though *no Claim* could be made, I will not say, but that *some Guesses* might be formed, *some Hopes* entertained, that a *Gracious God* would, in some Way or other, *at Length* receive him into Favour. The Generality, however, especially of *habitual Sinners*, should they at all *think* of reforming themselves, would be greatly discouraged from making an Attempt, of which the *Difficulties* would appear *certain*, and the *Success* only *doubtful*. And the Hopes of those Few (if any such should be found) who might have Courage to engage in, and Strength to go through, this arduous Undertaking, must be mightily check'd by the *Apprehension* of frequent *Relapses*, and the *Consciousness* of having at best done *no more* towards a Removal of their Guilt, than would have been *their Duty* to have done, had they never contracted it. In short, What *Hopes* soever might have been entertain'd, *These* (I presume) must generally have been so *wavering* and languid, as

M

could

could hardly have been of any considerable Efficacy towards either the *Reformation* or the *Comfort* of fallen Man.

For a *whole Race* of such Beings then, and among them *ourselves*, thus *sitting in Darkness*, and ^a *through Fear of Death*, both Temporal and Eternal, *all our Life-time subject to Bondage*, to be visited by a Messenger from Heaven, and that no less a Person than *His only-begotten Son*, sent from the *Bosom of the Father*, to assure us,—That God is not only *willing* to enter into Terms of Reconciliation with us, but, when the whole Creation must still have been *silent*, has *Himself provided* the *All-sufficient Ransom!* — That, upon our *sincere Repentance*, (which also His *Assistance* will *render practicable* and easy) *We may* Now once more ^b *come with Boldness to the Throne of Grace!* — Nay, that ^c *if any Man sin* again, yet still, on the same equitable Condition, *we have an Advocate with the Father, a Propitiation* of inexhaustible Efficacy for our Sins! — Here certainly is ^d *strong Consolation* and Encouragement to *All Men every where to repent!* ^e *These are Good Tidings of Great Joy to all People!* We no longer wonder at, but are ready to join in, that most just Declaration of

^a Heb. II. 15.

^b Ibid. IV. 16.

^c 1 Joh. II. 1, 2.

^d Heb. VI. 18.

^e Luk. II. 10.

Saint Paul.—^a *Yea, doubtless, I count all Things but Loss for the Excellency of the Knowledge of CHRIST Jesus, my LORD; For whom I suffer the Loss of all Things, and do count them but Dung, that I may win CHRIST; and be found in HIM, not having, that is, not trusting to, mine own Righteousness, which is of the Law, (that is, for so the Apostle may well be understood to mean, either of Moses or of Nature) but the Righteousness, which is by Faith of Jesus CHRIST; even the Righteousness, which is of GOD by Faith!*

Yet, blessed be GOD! we need not, and in Justice to His Gospel we must not, stop here. Our Deliverance is indeed great; but the Provision made for our Future Happiness is still greater: ^b *We are begotten again unto a lively Hope, through the Resurrection of CHRIST from the Dead: Unto an Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for us! I might therefore now go on to enquire, What Satisfaction we could probably have had from Nature upon This important Point; and perhaps we may find farther Cause to stand fast in the Faith of the Gospel, and to rejoice in Its Light.*

And here, the Doctrine of a Resurrection of the Body must by no means be left out of

^a Phil. III. 8, 9.

^b 1 Pet. I. 3, 4.

our Enquiries under this Head. But why do I say, *Enquiries*, with relation to this Article? which is confessedly such as *Nature* could give no *Affurance*, scarce any *Suspicion*, of: So far otherwise, that, now it is *revealed* with all the Evidence, that our LORD'S Resurrection, together with the fullest Declarations both of Himself and His Apostles, can give it, the Patrons of the Self-sufficiency of Reason generally reject it as absurd and irrational. *This Doctrine* therefore we may have Leave to place to the Account of *Revelation*, *Its Enemies being the Judges*.

I am aware, They will tell us, "They do not *envy* us the Credit of such a Discovery; because the Doctrine, whatever be determined concerning Its *Truth*, can be of little or no *Importance*." But, surely, this is *saying* much more than They can *prove*. We have in this Life no *Experience*, and can therefore have no *Knowledge*, of the Condition of *Pure Spirits*: And yet, without such Knowledge, it can be no easy Matter to determine, *how far* the Happiness of the *compound* Being, MAN, or even of that Part of his Composition, which we call *Spirit*, may depend upon Its being *united to*, and acting in Conjunction with, the *Body*. We say indeed, * *that the*

a Wisd. IX. 15.

corruptible Body presseth down the Soul, and clogs it in its Operations: And we say what is very true. But, when ^a This corruptible shall have put on Incorruption; when ^b what is sown in Weakness shall be raised in Power; who can tell how different the Case may be. However, without attempting any Refinements on this Subject, the Doctrine of a Resurrection must, to us Christians, appear important in every View; so important, that St. Paul declares our Faith vain without It. 'Tis indeed by This we are assured, that ^c the Victory which our Saviour hath given us over Sin and Death is compleat, and that the Happiness He hath procured for us will be entire. The Resurrection is the great ^d Restitution of all Things in Man, to that Perfection, in which he was originally created. The Ruins of our Nature at the Fall are in part repaired by Grace and Holiness here, and will be finally so by This ^e Redemption of our Bodies; when, in each Part of our Composition, ^f as in Adam All die, even so in CHRIST All shall be made alive.

However, because Many seem willing (in Theory, I mean) to consider the Mind as every Thing, and the Body as Nothing; and will accordingly tell us, 'tis sufficient for the Pur-

^a 1 Cor. XV. 53.

^b Ibid. 43.

^c Ibid. XIV. 57.

^d Acts III. 21.

^e Rom. VIII. 23.

^f 1 Cor. XV. 22.

poses of a *Future State*, if convincing Evidence can be produced for the *Soul's Immortality*, without regard to Its Union with the *same* or a *different* System of Matter, or indeed *any* System of Matter *at all*: You will permit me to carry on the Enquiry to this Particular also. The *Immortality of the Soul* is a Point of so great Moment, that I would not willingly detract from the *just* Force of any Argument in Its Favour. But, whilst *the Foundation of God in the Gospel standeth sure*, this Article is safe: And the Importance of the Doctrine is, itself, one good Cause why we should not *needlessly* rest in uncertain Reasonings about It.

Now the *Natural* Proofs of the Soul's Immortality, Those of them at least on which the greatest Stress has usually been laid, are (I conceive) reducible to these two Heads. — The *Immaterial Nature of the Soul Itself*; and — The *Circumstances of Man in this World compared with our Ideas concerning the Maker and Governour of it*.

Upon which it will be proper to observe, that the *Force* of These, or any other *supposed* Proofs of the *same Kind*, may be very *different* according to the different *Application* of it. We readily admit, that the Considerations just mention'd contain *Terror* abundantly sufficient

ficient to alarm the Fears of the Vicious and the Prophane; and, by the Way, *should* remind such Persons, that, though they could shake off the Belief of *Revealed Religion*, They may still find themselves at a loss for some *farther Security* against the uneasy Apprehensions of a *Future Reckoning*. But then, the same Arguments, when applied to the Proof of *Rewards*, suffer great *Abatements* in their Evidence. The Uncertainty, in which *Nature* must ever leave *fallen Man* about the *Pardon* of Sin, cannot but be an insuperable Bar to all *merely Natural* Proofs of a *Happy Immortality*. Our Assurance of *any* Reward, especially of an *endless* one, for past Services, cannot possibly rise higher than our Assurance of Forgiveness for past Transgressions. We must, in the Order of Things, first be *accepted* by God before we can be *rewarded*: And, as certain is it, that we must, every one of us, first be *pardon'd* before we can be *accepted*.

But, waving this Exception, let us briefly enquire, To *what Degree* of Evidence the Arguments here suggested may reasonably be thought to amount.

That we have within us a Principle *distinct from Matter*, is what we may be sufficiently assured of; because we may have such Assurance

rance as *Consciousness* itself can give us, that we exert such Powers, and perform such Operations, in numberless Instances, as are incompatible with the known Properties of *mere Matter*. But, when we have gone *thus far*, what have we proved? No more, I presume, than *this*; that we have within us a Principle not liable to be destroy'd by a *Separation* of any *Parts* of which It is compounded: Which amounts indeed to thus much, that our *Souls* cannot perish after the *same Manner*, and need not be supposed to perish at the *same Time*, with our *Bodies*. But, if we thence conclude, that our *Souls cannot* perish in *any Manner*, or at *any Time*, we go farther than our Premises will fairly carry us. In fact, all *created* Beings, and among the rest our *Souls* as well as our *Bodies*, depend on their Creator for the *Continuance*, as well as for the first *Grant*, of their Existence. *How long* therefore this Existence of our *Souls* shall be continued, must be known, not from their Nature, but from His Good Pleasure, ^a *who only hath Immortality*; and ^b *in whom we live, and move, and have our Being*.

Our natural *Presages* of *Something* after Death, and our *Longings* for *Immortality*, may indeed be consider'd as *Divine Declarations*

^a 1 Tim. VI. 16.

^b Acts XVII. 28.

upon this Point ; especially since the *Faculties* of the human Mind appear fitted for a *longer Duration* and for *nobler Purposes* than the *present* Life affords them : To which if we add the *seemingly promiscuous* Distribution of this World's good Things, and the numerous Instances of unrewarded, of suffering, Virtue ; *These*, consider'd jointly with the known Attributes of the Deity, plead strongly for some *more regular* Adjustment than is to be discover'd in Man's *present* State. And yet, *before* we come at any Conclusion in *favour* of the *Best* of mere Men, many Things must be *supposed*, many *proved*, upon which an attentive Mind might be allow'd to hesitate : Nor is the Conclusion itself, when we are at length arrived at it, any more to be compared with the Light which the Gospel holds forth to us, than *probable Presumptions* are with *infallible Assurances* ; or than an *indefinite*, and it may be very *short*, Enjoyment of *some Degree* of Happiness is *worthy to be compared* with ^a *an Exceeding and Eternal Weight of Glory*.

The Result is briefly This. — The *Reality* of *some* Future State of *Rewards* and *Punishments*, especially the *latter*, may be made *extremely* probable, if not demonstratively cer-

a 2 Cor. IV. 17.

tain, from Principles of *Reason*. But as to the *Nature* or the *Duration* of such a State, Reason must stand silent and suspended, listening for some farther Information. And, if such Information has been vouchsafed, Reason should receive it with Reverence and Thankfulness; ^a *not as being the Word of Man, but (as it is in Truth) the Word of God.*

I am sensible, it is often presumed by Wise and Good Men, that the *Immortality* of the *Human Soul* is demonstrable by *Reason*. And so it is, by the *Reason of Christians*, by Reason improved and enlighten'd by Revelation. *Life Everlasting* is an Article, the Evidence whereof shines forth in *every Page* of the Gospel; and whilst we *Christians* employ our Reason in the Investigation of Its Proofs, we are like Travellers, not only in *broad Day-light*, but upon a *Road* with which we have been long *acquainted*. But, were we wholly *Strangers to this good Land of Promise*, we should soon be sensible how much we *wanted* a *Guide*. We could then only ^b *feel after, if haply we might find*, that ^c *Hope, which is now, in full View set before us.* Those Arguments which, in our present Situation, appear plain and convincing, would then be perplex'd with Doubts and clogged with Difficulties: They

^a 1 Theff. II. 13.

^b Acts XVII. 27.

^c Heb. VI. 18.

would

would want much of that Clearness and Certainty, which, as we flatter ourselves, our own Penetration, but which, in Reality, *the Light of the Glorious Gospel*, gives them.

Were the Case otherwise, *whence* all that Diffidence, which betrays itself on this Head, in the Writings of the so much and so justly celebrated *Sages* of the *Heathen* World? Many of these, we know, wanted not *Inclination*, nor (had the Thing been practicable) *Abilities*, to *establish* the Doctrine by such Arguments as those already considered. And what was the Result of their Attempts this Way? A *Denial* of the Article in *too many*; Misgivings and *Distrust* about it in *all the rest*. The *Vulgar* indeed, whether from Nature or Tradition, seem generally to have expected *Something* after Death. And as to the *Better Sort*, the Rewards, they wished rather than hoped for, served them tolerably well to furnish out *agreeable Incidents* and Embellishments for their *Poems*, or *refined Sentiments* for their Speculations in *Philosophy*. But, all this while, there were visibly wanting some *more powerful Supports* for Virtue; some *more awakening Motives* to Reformation for the World in general, and some *more fixed Principles* of Action, for the Philosophers themselves. They wanted

wanted that ^a *faithful Saying*, that *Promise* which *Godliness bath of a Life to come* as well as of *That which Now is*: A *Promise*, which alone could beget in them any well-grounded Assurance, or such ^b *an Hope*, as would be to them *an Anchor of the Soul*, both *sure and steadfast*.

And, after all, were the *merely Natural* Proofs of a Happy Immortality more indubitably conclusive than they appear to be; yet, in every Argument of this Kind the *Conclusion* is too *distant*, and the *intermediate Steps* too laborious and *intricate*, to be attempted by the greatest Part of Mankind, or to be with Ease gone through by Any. And, even among the *Thinking Few*, the Process is, in this Method, so *long*, that the *true Use* of the Disquisition is too often dropt *by the Way*. The *abstracted Reasoner*, in this Case (to borrow St. James's Comparison) ^c *is like unto a Man beholding his Natural Face in a Glass*. He contemplates with much Complacency those Arguments which he considers as *Reflections* from his own Mind. But then, this *self-wrought* Conviction too frequently serves him for *Ostentation* rather than *Improvement*. ^d *He beboledth himself, and goeth his Way; and*

^a 1 Tim. IV. 8, 9.

^b Heb. VI. 19.

^c Jam. I. 23.

^d Ibid. 24.

straightway forgetteth what Manner of Man he was.

Whereas *the* ^a *Word of God is*, in this Particular especially, *quick and powerful*. Here the Evidence is short and clear, full and decisive: An Evidence easy and level to all Capacities; ready and applicable to all Exigencies. After our LORD's Resurrection at least, it cannot now be ^b *thought a Thing incredible that God should raise the Dead*: And, that He finally *will* do so, we can no longer doubt, since He, ^c *who hath the Keys of Hell and of Death* has assured us, that ^d *All that are in their Graves shall hear His Voice and shall come forth*: They, that have done Good, to the Resurrection of Life; and They, that have done Evil, to the Resurrection of Damnation! The Description, which our ^e *Judge Himself* (the same Almighty Person) has given of the *awful Circumstances*, and the *important Consequences*, of that *Universal Judgment* which will then be open'd, carries in it such awakening Considerations as mere Nature was an entire Stranger to. And accordingly, do but compare the *most labour'd Passages* of the *most admired Heathen Writers* with the *ordinary Language* and Sentiments of the *New Testa-*

^a Heb. IV. 12.

^b Acts XXVI. 8.

^c Rev. I. 18.

^d Joh. V. 28, 29.

^e Matt. XXV. 31--40.

ment;

ment; and You will want no farther Proof of the *Excellency of the Knowledge of CHRIST Jesus*, or of the Propriety of representing *Death* as ^a *abolished*, and *Life and Immortality* as *brought to Light by the Gospel*.

II. We may therefore now go on to consider, *What Influence* the foregoing Reflections ought to have towards engaging us to *stand fast in the LORD*.

Now this Influence must not be here understood as *exclusive* of, but as *presupposing*, the Belief of the Truth of Christianity upon Its *proper Evidence*. We propose not the gracious Offers, the *precious Promises*, of the Gospel as the *only Reasons* Men should have for their Adherence to It. We invite all Persons, according to their Abilities and Opportunities, to consider carefully and conscientiously the *proper Proofs* of our Holy Religion, *that* resulting from our LORD's *Resurrection* in particular; that ^b *Knowing whom*, and upon what Grounds, *They have believed*, They may at once, themselves, ^c *have Boldness in the Faith*, and may be *ready to give an Answer*, whensoever called upon for ^d *the Reasons of the Hope that is in them*. — But, if any there be,

a 2 Tim. I. 10. b Comp. 2 Tim. I. 12. c 1 Tim. III. 13.
d 1 Pet. III. 15.

who,

who, without regarding the direct Proofs of Revealed Religion, consider it as scarce of Importance enough to be steadily maintained or *earnestly contended for*; if any, who are ready to suffer *Demonstration* for It to be born down by *confident Assertions*, or even *seeming Difficulties*, against It: To such Persons this *Word of Exhortation* may properly be directed.

And surely, such an Exhortation need not *now* be drawn out into any *great Length*. If what has been already offer'd be *true*, the Steadfastness, to which You are here exhorted, *is not a vain Thing*; *for it is Your Life*: 'Tis that, on which Your *Security* with regard to every Interest worth securing *entirely depends*. Whilst You adhere to Your Christian Profession, the Way to the Divine Favour, and to a happy Immortality, lies plain before You. But, if once You *draw back*, Darknes and Perplexity, or (in the Language of the Prophet) *'Fear and the Pit and the Snare* are the inevitable Consequence. And are These become so desirable, that You should, for the Sake of them, *^b cast away Your Confidence, which hath so great a Recompence of Reward!*

It is perhaps scarce possible for *us Christians* to take a *just Estimate* of those Advantages,

^a Isai. XXIV. 17.

^b Heb. X. 35.

from the Want of which a happy Education has hitherto exempted us. But—^a *Blessed are our Eyes, for They see; and our Ears, for They hear! For verily, I say unto You, Many righteous Men in former Ages have desired to see those Things which we see, and have not seen them; and to hear those Things which we hear, and have not heard them!* Even the ^b *Prophets*, Persons favoured with extraordinary Communications of the Spirit of GOD, after *enquiring and searching diligently*, could obtain only a distant and *indistinct View* of that Salvation, which is *preached in our Synagogues every Sabbath-Day*. Nay the very ^c *Angels*, we are told, *desire to look into that stupendous Mystery of our Redemption, that inestimable Provision made for us in a future State, ^d which Eye had not seen, nor Ear heard, nor had entered into the Heart of Man, till GOD was pleased to reveal them to us by His Spirit!*—And is it possible, that we should entertain with *Coldness* or *Indifference* such *distinguishing Privileges!* that we should in any Degree ^e *neglect so great Salvation!* that we should be ready and even forward, on Account of a few seemingly ^f *hard Sayings*, to take Leave of a Religion, which alone *bath the Words of Eternal Life*. — Stu-

^a Matt. XIII. 16, 17.

^b 1 Pet. I. 10.

^c Ibid. 12.

^d 1 Cor. II. 9, 10.

^e Heb. II. 3.

^f Joh. VI. 60, 68.

pidity or Madness would hardly be thought Terms strong enough to express the Nature of such a Conduct in *Temporal* Concerns. Let not then *the same* Proceeding, in an Affair, the Importance of which is out of the Reach of all Comparison, be affected as a Mark of *superiour Genius* or *extraordinary Penetration* in thinking.

Let us ask the *Seducer*, should any such attempt to *spoil us of our Reward* by drawing us off from that Profession, which alone gives us any well-grounded Expectations of It, “What *Security* we are to have of the *Par-*
“*don* of our *Sins*?” And “What *Provision* is
“made for our *Final Happiness*, upon his
“Scheme?” These are Particulars, about which we *may be* sufficiently *secure*, whilst we continue *where we are*; and we have been used to think them of so great *Moment*, that he *must excuse* us if we insist on having some very *valuable Considerations*, before we consent to any *Removal*, which may endanger them. He will *promise us Liberty*, from the Impositions of Priests, from the Bondage of Superstition, perhaps (if he vouchsafe to speak out) from the Restraints of *All Religion*. But, without examining, *how justly* these Grievances are at present complained of *amongst us*; what will all this *Liberty* he so much talks of, nay

^a *what will the whole World profit us, if we may, notwithstanding, lose our own Souls? — Or, what will he give us in Exchange for the Soul?*

Thus far an *Apostasy* from our Christian Profession has been considered as *cutting us off* from the Privileges of It. And yet, even *This is not All.* — It concerns us to remember that ^b *Our Unbelief will by no Means render the Faith of GOD without Effect.* The Gospel will not be the *less true* for our Renouncing the Profession of It: And if Its gracious Offers cannot *save*, They will most certainly *condemn* us. Our Blessed LORD declared to the *Jews* more than once, that ^c *His Coming among them*, with such Attestations to His Authority as He brought, had left them *no Cloak for their Sin* in rejecting Him and His Doctrine. Yet They had many alleviating Pleas, to which We have no Title; whilst We enjoy many corroborating Proofs of the Divinity of His Mission, which They had not. ^d *Of how much sorer Punishment then, suppose Ye, should we be thought worthy, if, after We have from our Infancy tasted the Good Word of GOD, and the Powers of the World to come, any among us should fall away! — But I for-*

^a Matt. XVI. 26.

^b Rom. III. 3.

^c Joh. XV. 22,

23, &c.

^d Comp. Heb. X. 26. with, Chap. VI. 5, 6.

bear:

bear: Assuring myself, All of us here present are ready to cry out with united Voice; “*We are not of them that draw back unto Perdition, but of them that believe to the Saving of the Soul!*”

I am sensible how long You have already been detained. Yet our Reflections on the *Glorious Advantages* of the Gospel Revelation must not be concluded without some short Recollection of the *peculiar Motives* suggested to us by the Doctrines we have been considering, not only to *hold fast the Profession of our Faith without Wavering*, but to *adorn it with a suitable Holiness in all Manner of Conversation*.

How forcibly, for instance, must *the Love of CHRIST*, in Dying for our Redemption, ^b *constrain us* to devote ourselves and all our Faculties to His Service! *Because* (as St. Paul argues) *We must thus judge; that if one died for All, then were All dead; and that He died for All, that They, who thus live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him, who died for them and rose again.* And, when to the *Greatness* of the *Deliverance* we add the *Value* of the *Ransom* paid for It; reflecting, with St. Peter, that ^c *we were not redeemed with corruptible Things as Silver and*

a Heb. X. 39.

b 2 Cor. V. 14, 15.

c 1 Pet. I. 18, 19.

Gold, but with the precious Blood of CHRIST, as of a Lamb without Blemish and without Spot; what Energy does this give to His preceding Exhortation, to ^a be holy as He who hath called us is holy! Especially, since it was one great End for which ^b CHRIST gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar People, zealous of Good Works!

Again: To reflect, that ^c He, who raised up CHRIST from the Dead, shall also quicken our Mortal Bodies by His Spirit, which dwelleth in us: What an Argument is This against profaning These Temples of the Holy Ghost by any Excess or Impurity! What an Incitement to ^d every one to possess his Vessel in Sanctification and Honour! How must the exalted Nature of Those Enjoyments, which we are taught to expect hereafter, consisting in being ^e like GOD Himself and seeing Him as He is, engage every Man that hath This Hope in him, to purify himself even as He is pure! What a glorious Encouragement, to be not only ^f steadfast and unmoveable, but always abounding in the Work of the LORD, must it be to know, as we Christians do know, that our Labour

^a 1 Pet. I. 15.

^b Tit. II. 14.

^c Rom. VIII. 11.

^d 1 Theff. IV. 4.

^e 1 Joh. III. 2, 3.

^f 1 Cor. XV. 58.

shall,

shall, in no Kind or Degree of it, be unrewarded or *in vain in the LORD!*

These Considerations, with many others which Christianity suggests, might be dwelt upon with more Pleasure, did but the *Lives* of All who profess to believe them *fulfil our Joy*. But the *Motives* of the Gospel, though *not so ineffectual* as some would represent them, were never intended to *change* our *Natures*: As they *find* us, so they *leave* us, MEN; and so long as we are *but* Men, it will be more than possible for us to *receive even this manifold Grace of God in vain*. — Sometimes, no doubt, the Scriptural Notices of a Future State meet with *unbelieving*, and therefore *unaffected*, unimproved Hearts. More frequently, Men's Belief is *general* only and *historical*; such as we entertain of some *distant* Country, of which *we have heard the Fame with our Ears*, and concerning which *many Excellent Things are spoken*; but in the Accounts whereof, because it *is* distant, we are willing to think ourselves, at least for the *present*, but *remotely interested*. Or if (which is perhaps the *most common* Case of all) we seriously believe, and are at some Intervals heartily affected with, what we hear of another World; yet Amusement, Diversion, Company, what we call Business, in short, something or other,

continually comes in our Way, and takes off our *Attention* from Those Truths, of which we are all the while *habitually persuaded*: And 'tis no wonder, that *Temptations* when *present* should prove an Over-match for *Persuasions* which are *only habitual*. This, however, is a *fore Evil under the Sun*. The Happiness of Heaven is indeed at *some Distance* from us Now; but, by this means, we may be assured, It will be for Ever *hid from our Eyes*.

To prevent our Miscarrying, then, in an Affair of This inconceivable Importance, let us give all *Diligence* to fix in our Minds a prevailing Sense, at once of the *inestimable Privileges* and of the *indispensable Obligations* of our high and *holy Calling*. To this End, let us take all proper Opportunities of attending upon That publick Worship and Those Holy *Ordinances*, which were graciously instituted for *these* among other Purposes; that they might bring to our *Remembrance*, and (as it were) *force* upon our Minds, *the Love of CHRIST in dying for us*; and that they might *habituate* our Thoughts to the Contemplations, and our *Affections* to the *Relish*, of Those Pleasures, which are prepared for our Everlasting Enjoyment. Such Exercises, when performed with that *Frequency* which our Religion prescribes and which even Prudence would direct, and
with

with those *Dispositions* which ought always to accompany them, will not only derive upon us the salutary Influences of *Divine Grace*, but will, in their *Natural Tendency*, strengthen our *Faith*, animate our *Hopes*, and give Fervour to our *Charity*; till they have produced in us that *Heavenly Frame* of Mind, which alone will be a steady Principle of a *truly Christian Life*. — A Life, regulated indeed ^a by *Faith not by Sight*; and the Measures whereof are taken from ^b *looking, not on the Things which are seen, but on the Things, which are not seen*: A Life therefore, which the Sensualist and the Libertine will be sure to *account Madness*; and which the Ostentatious, the Melancholick, or the Enthusiast, may represent under some Disadvantage by *over-acting* It: But a Life, *in Itself*, manly and rational; founded in a strict Attention to, and an exact Judgment concerning, the *real Moments* of Things; and supported here, as it will be for ever justified hereafter, by this *single Consideration*. — “^c *The Things which are seen are but Temporal, whereas the Things which are not seen are Eternal!*”

a 2 Cor. V. 7.

b Ibid. IV. 18.

c Ibid.

S E R M O N V I I I .

I JOHN III. 8.

—*For this Purpose the Son of GOD was manifested, that He might destroy the Works of the Devil.*

IT is a common Observation, that a *Bu-
siness*, which belongs equally to *every
Body*, is generally neglected by *All*, or
however seldom executed as it should
be by *Any*.—And the Observation will, I be-
lieve, be found alike applicable to the *Times
when*, as to the *Persons by whom*, any Thing
is to be done. Where *no certain* Time is ap-
pointed for the Performance of an Action or
the Commemoration of an Event; such Per-
formance or such Commemoration is, in a
Multiplicity of other Affairs more immediate-
ly pressing, mighty apt to be put off to *some
more convenient Season*; which more conve-
nient Season, for the same Cause, *never* comes
at all; So that what might very properly have
been

been performed at *any Time*, and was really intended to be performed at *one Time* or *other*, is however actually performed at *no Time* whatever.

To remedy the *former* of these Inconveniences all wise Institutions, particularly Divine Institutions where GOD Himself has thought fit to interpose, have set apart particular *Persons* or *Orders of Men* for the Discharge of particular *Offices* or *Functions*. And the Appointment of *stated Seasons* for the Performance of *special Observances* or the Commemoration of *signal Events*, is founded on the same Reasons, and justified by the same Authority. Hence the well-known *annual Feasts* prescribed by GOD Himself to His own People, the *Jews*: Nay that *weekly Feast*, of the *Sabbath*, was for *This* among other Reasons instituted yet more early, and made of more extensive Obligation; having been set apart for the Worship of the Creator of all Things *from the Beginning*, and reaching to all the Sons of *Adam*: Not that the Worship of our Creator can be improper, or is indeed unnecessary, on *any Day* of the Week: But lest, what *might* be done on *any Day* should, if left at large, be done on *no Day*; it was wisely enjoined, *not* to be left undone on the *other Six Days*, but to be performed with more Solemnity

lemnity on *one Day in Seven*, in Order to secure *any* Performance of it at all.

And *This*, I apprehend, is a sufficient Reason for the annual and solemn Observation of That *Holy Season*, upon which we are now entering. There is *no Day* in the Year on which we might not justly adore the Goodness of Almighty God in *sending His only begotten Son into the World* to save us, and all Mankind from the deplorable State into which we were fallen; *no Time*, when we might not properly remember the *Love of our Redeemer Himself* in condescending to *take upon Him our Flesh*, and to make His Appearance under all the lowest Circumstances of our Condition; nor could it *on any Occasion* be unreasonable to *apply* These Reflections to such *pious and charitable* Purposes as They are always fitted to promote. And yet, without a *peculiar Designation* of some *one determinate Season* for recollecting the *Benefits* we *may* receive from This great Event, and the *Duties necessary* to our so receiving them; there is great Reason to fear, that these Benefits and these Duties would, *from Day to Day, from Year to Year*, pass by unheeded and be forgotten by Us. But by appointing This *annual Solemnity*, and inviting all Her Sons to the due Celebration of it, *our Church* has provided, as far

far as human Institutions can provide, that the *Remembrance* of our Saviour's *Incarnation*, of the *End* and *Purpose* of That glorious Event, and of the *Obligations* we are laid under by It, may in *one Part* at least of *every Year* force *itself* upon our Minds, and may have its proper Influence, *through all other Parts* of it, upon our Lives and Conversations. And God grant that we may all happily *answer* the Design of *This* Appointment !

The Words of my *Text* may, I hope, give us all some Direction and Assistance on This Occasion : And with this View, You will easily foresee, I have at present made Choice of them. For indeed, Words cannot well be chosen better suited, either to the *Points* of *Christian* Doctrine which I have in View, or to Your *reasonable Expectations* from me on this Occasion : — More *expressive* of the *Nature* and *End* of the great Event above-mentioned ; or more *significant* at once of our *Privileges* resulting from it, or our *Duty* consequent thereupon. — *For this Purpose the Son of GOD was manifested, that He might destroy the Works of the Devil.*

The Import of the Words will (I hope) be sufficiently explained to You, and my Design in the Choice of them so far answered, if You will please to go along with me in the four following Enquiries ;

I. Who

I. Who is here meant by the *Son of God*, and what by His *being manifested*?

II. What we are here to understand as meant by *the Works of the Devil*?

III. How the Manifestation of the *Son of God* is fitted to *destroy these Works*?
And,

IV. What *Uses we are to make* of the Doctrines occurring to us under the foregoing Heads?

I. And *First*, We are to enquire, *Who* it is that is here called, *the Son of God*?

Now the Title, "*Son of God*," is used on various Occasions, and in different Senses, in Holy Scripture. Sometimes *all* good Christians are called **Sons of God*, inasmuch as He has been pleased to adopt them, and to admit them to address Him by the endearing Compellation of, *^b Abba, Father*. — Again, those glorious Spirits, the Holy Angels, are in the ancient Book of *Job* represented as joyful Spectators of the great Work of Creation, and are by Way of Eminence styled, *Sons of God*: **When the Morning-Stars sang together, and all the Sons of God shouted for Joy.*

^a 1 Joh. III. 2. ^b Rom. VIII. 15, 16. ^c Job XXXVIII. 7.

—And,

— And, to produce no other Instance, *Adam* is, by the *Evangelist*, called ^a *Son of GOD*; as having come *immediately* out of GOD's Hands, and *not* having *any other Father* to whom his Generation could, in the *usual Way* of Descent, be ascribed.

But in none of these Senses is the Title, "*Son of GOD*," to be understood in the Text. The Person to whom it is here applied is elsewhere called *the only-begotten Son of GOD*; and ^b *to which of either Men or Angels said He at any Time, "Thou art my Son; this Day "have I begotten Thee?"* The *Son of GOD* here said to be *manifested*, then, is no other but the *Second Person* in the adorable *Trinity*; and He is so called by virtue of a *Relation* infinitely *superiour* to any of Those above-mentioned; as being of the *same Nature and Essence* with the Father, truly and *properly GOD*: At once *Son of GOD*, because *deriving* His Nature *from* the Father, and because *deriving* the *very same Nature* with That of the Father. — That our Blessed LORD ^c *called GOD his Father*, ἰδὼν πατέρα, in such a *peculiar Sense* as no created Being could do, the *Jews* understood very well, when from hence they concluded, (by an Inference, which He could hardly have failed to *correct*, had it been an

^a Luk. III. 38.^b Heb. I. 5.^c Joh. V. 18.

erroneous one,) that He made Himself equal with God.

However, “that CHRIST is *truly* and *properly* GOD, of the *same* Substance, Nature “and Essence with the Father,” is a Doctrine, which need not be grounded on a doubtful Inference of His Enemies the *Jews* only; but is established by many Proofs not to be evaded, either in *direct Terms* occurring in, or by *just Consequence* deducible from, other Parts of the inspired Writings. And it is a Doctrine of so high *Importance* to the Christian Faith at all Times, that a Recollection of such Proofs can never be unseasonable, but must be more especially proper whensoever we are considering the Doctrine of our LORD’s Manifestation in our Nature: Our grateful Sentiments of which Condescension must always be greatly affected by the Notions we entertain of ^a *that Glory which He had with the Father before the World was*;—that Glory, of which He was pleased for a Time to ^b *empty Himself*, when ^c *for our Sakes He became poor, that we through His Poverty might be Rich*.

Now “that CHRIST is truly and properly “GOD” may be evinced by a Variety of Considerations; of which the Time will allow me

^a Joh. XVII. 5.

^b Phil. II. 7.

^c 2 Cor. VIII. 9.

but

but to *mention* a few, without any distinct or *full Enlargement* upon them. And

1. The *Names* or *Titles* of GOD are expressly in Scripture applied to CHRIST. St. *John* tells us in plain Words, that the *Logos* or ^a *Word* was not only *with* GOD in the *Beginning*, but *was*, Himself, GOD. He is elsewhere styled, ^b *True GOD*, ^c *GOD with us*, ^d *the Great GOD*, ^e *the mighty GOD*, ^f *GOD over all blessed for ever*; &c. And even the *incommunicable Name*, *Jehovah*, appears, by comparing Passages, to be several Times applied to Him. I need not cite particular Texts, which are well known; and from all which put together, we must conclude, (unless we could suppose the Holy Scriptures intended, not to *guide us into all Truth* but to mislead us from it) that He, who has the *distinguished Titles* of GOD, must have the *Nature* and *Essence* of GOD also. — But

2. The *Attributes* and *Perfections* of GOD as well as the Names and Titles, are frequently in Scripture ascribed to the same Person: And these, not only his *Moral Perfections*, such as are in some Degree capable of being imitated by Creatures *made after His Image*; but His *Natural* and *Essential Attributes*,

a Joh. I. 1. b 1 Joh. V. 20. c Matt. I. 23. d Titus II. 13.
e Isai. IX. 6. f Rom. IX. 5.

which

which are incommunicable to any created Being, and which *Jehovah* frequently challenges as His own peculiar Property, in Opposition to all *false* GODS. Such are *Eternity*, *Unchangeableness*, *Omniscience*, and *Omnipresence*. Passages of Scripture ascribing These Divine Attributes to the *Son*, have often been produced and incontestably maintained by learned Men. Waving therefore a distinct Recital of them here, it may be sufficient to observe, that the Work of *Creating* and *sustaining all Things* (a Work which must *require*, and therefore *imply*, the Perfections just mentioned in the Subject of it) is every where ascribed to Him. Thus, St. *John* tells us expressly, that ^a *all Things were made by Him*, i. e. the Word just before spoken of: And St. *Paul*, that ^b *All Things were created by Him and for Him*: And that as *He is before All Things*, so *by Him all Things consist*, or are kept in Being. In the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, GOD is said to have ^c *made the Worlds by His Son*, and to *uphold all Things by the Word of His Power* or by His powerful Word. Now the same inspired Writer having, according to one of the clearest Dictates of *Right Reason*, asserted, that ^d *He that built all Things is GOD*;

^a Joh. I. 3. ^b Col. I. 16, 17. ^c Heb. I. 2, 3. ^d Ibid. III. 4.

the Conclusion is unavoidable, that therefore the Son is GOD. — In Consequence of This,

3. Such *Religious Worship* is paid to CHRIST as can be neither due nor payable to any Being but GOD. * *That all Men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father*, is asserted by the Son Himself; which Equality of Honour the lowly and humble *Jesus* would never have allowed, much less assumed, had He not been conscious of His having an *equal Title* to it; and an *equal Title* to Honour or *Worship* He could not have, unless partaking of the *same Nature*, with the Father. When the *Devil*, tempting our LORD, requires *Worship* from Him; our LORD might have excused Himself from paying it by many other Considerations; but He chose to insist on such a Reason only for His Refusal as holds with equal Strength against all Creature-Worship whatsoever: “^b *Thou shalt worship the LORD thy GOD, and Him only shalt thou serve.*” The *Galatians* are blamed for having “^c *done Service* (the very lowest Degree of *Worship*) *to them who by Nature were no Gods.* And yet, the Father Himself, “^d *when He bringeth in the first-begotten into the World, saith, “Let all the Angels of GOD worship Him.”* The

^a Joh. V. 23.

^b Matt. IV. 10.

^c Gal. IV. 8.

^d Heb. I. 6.

Consequence is clear; that He, who is to be *thus* worshipped, and that too by the *highest Order* of created Beings, and this at the *Command* of the *Father Himself*, must by the Declaration of the same Father be *by Nature*, that is, in the highest Sense, GOD. — I may farther urge,

4. The *Form*, in which our LORD has directed the solemn Rite of *Baptism* to be administered; “^a *In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost:*” A Form of our Blessed Saviour’s prescribing, for the *perpetual Use* of his Church, in the very Act of Initiation or Admission into it; a Form, which in the *natural Construction* of it must imply an Equality in the Persons, whose Names are equally joined in it: It being highly improper, according to all our Notions of Propriety, that GOD and *two Creatures* should be put upon a Level in so *important* a Ceremony. And indeed, to have assumed to Himself such an Honour, would have been a Proceeding utterly irreconcilable with our LORD’s known Character and Behaviour on all other Occasions; had He *thought it any Robbery*, had He not been fully assured of the Justness of His Claim, to be *equal with GOD*.

^a Matt. XXVIII. 19.

Such then is the *Person* in my Text called *the Son of God*; and such His Essential Dignity, who was *manifested that He might destroy the Works of the Devil*. By which *Manifestation* we are to understand His Appearance in the Flesh, and *dwelling or tabernacling among us* here on Earth. By this Manifestation, He who was, before, truly and really God, became also *really and properly Man*: He, ^a *who was in the Form of God, took upon Him the Form of a Servant, and became in the Likeness of Men*. The Divine and the Human Natures were united in His Person, and of God and Man became one CHRIST. This is what St. *John* elsewhere expresses, where He says, ^b *The Word was made Flesh*; and St. *Paul*, where He tells us, that ^c *God was manifested in the Flesh*.

A *Mystery* This so great and astonishing, that the Mind of Man cannot fathom the Depth of it: No Wonder then, that Those *Pretenders to Reason*, who are so little acquainted with the Extent of Its Powers as to imagine, that the Human Understanding is commensurate to all Truth, should strain at the Belief of it. Accordingly we find, that, as on one Hand some have denied the *proper Divinity* of the Son of God, so on the other

^a Phil. II. 6, 7.^b Joh. I. 14.^c 1 Tim. III. 16.

some have denied His *real Humanity*, pretending that His *Manifestation* in the Flesh was all Shew and *Appearance only*. A Conceit as unsupported by Scripture, nay as contradictory to it, as the Denial of His Divinity has (I hope) already appeared to be. The whole History of His Birth, Life and Death is one continued Proof of His being truly Man. He was not so much as born a *complete Man* at first, as *Adam* was formed by the great Creator's Hand, but came into the World an *Infant* to shew His intire Participation of our Nature; and ^a *increased in Wisdom and Stature*, by the usual Slow Degrees at length arriving at confirmed Manhood. He hungered, He thirsted; He was weary, was sorrowful on particular Occasions; in short, He was subject to all the Weaknesses and Infirmities of our Nature, *Sin only excepted*. I now proceed to explain,

II. *Secondly*, What Those *Works of the Devil* are, which the *Son of God* was manifested in so extraordinary Manner that He might destroy them.

Now by *Works of the Devil* may be understood, *primarily*, those *Acts of Sin* and Wic-

^a Luk. II. 52.

kedness, which *He* tempts and induces *us* to commit; and, *secondarily*, that *Guilt* which is derived upon us, and that *Punishment* to which we become obnoxious, from the Commission of it.

The *Apostle* seems to have had the *former* of these *chiefly* in View; as appears from the immediately foregoing Words: ^a *He that committeth Sin is of the Devil, for the Devil sinneth from the Beginning*: And then follows, *For this Purpose the Son of GOD was manifested that He might destroy the Works of the Devil*. And indeed the inspired Writings do almost every-where ascribe the Vices and Sins, Men are guilty of, to this Apostate Spirit. Hence they are, by an easy Figure, called *his Works*: Not as if he were the *immediate* Doer, or *solely* accountable for them; but because he is, at least generally speaking, the *first Mover* towards them. They are justly called his Works, as being done at his *Instigation*: But, forasmuch as such Instigations *We* both *ought*, and have it in our *Power*, to resist; whensoever we do not resist them, notwithstanding that the *first Motions* may be ascribed to that wicked Spirit, *our Consent* makes the Sin our *own Act*; and the consequent Guilt becomes properly chargeable to *our Account*.

^a 1 Joh. III. 8.

All Acts of Sin and Wickedness are, in the Sense above-mentioned, Works of the Devil: But there are some special Kinds or Degrees of Sin, which are still more eminently so; which (as I may say) in a particular Manner bear his Image, and are in Holy Scripture branded and stigmatized under that Character. — Such are the Acts of Pride, spiritual and Intellectual Pride especially; which at first degraded Satan and his Accomplices from the glorious Dignity of Angels of Light, into the accursed State of Fiends of Darknes. — Such again is the Spirit of Impiety and Opposition to God and Goodness; which has been the great Characteristick of the Devil ever since his Fall, and still worketh in his Children, the Children of Disobedience. Among whom I may here particularly mention the Common Swearer and Prophaner of God's Name by wanton Oaths and Imprecations; who by audaciously calling down the Vengeance of the Almighty upon himself or his Companions, in Effect defies His Power and doth all that in him lies to render His Name contemptible. — Such also are ^a Hatred and Ill-will to Mankind; which are, both in the Estimation of our LORD and His beloved Apostle, one Degree of ^b Murder, and proceed from him, who was a Murtherer from

^a Matt. V. 22. ^b 1 Joh. III. 15.

the Beginning.—Such again are *Lying* and all the various Kinds of Treachery and Fraud; which are expressly ascribed to the ^a *Devil* as the *Father of them.*—But such most eminently were, at the Time of our Saviour's Appearing, those Acts of Riot, *Uncleanness*, and abominable *Idolatry*, which had then overspread the *Gentile World*, and are in many Passages of the *New Testament* attributed to ^b *the Prince of the Power of the Air*, as *Satan* is called on Account of his prevailing Influence at that Season.

But, though by *Works of the Devil* we may understand those *Acts of Sin* which are committed at his Instigation, and more peculiarly still those *Habits* in which Men most nearly resemble him; yet there is no Occasion to *confine* the Expression to this Meaning. That *Guilt* which was introduced into the Moral World by Sin, and that grievous *Punishment* which became due to the Workers of it, may well be considered (though in a more *remote* Sense) as *Works of the Devil*; as being the *just Consequences* of that Sin which he *works* in us. Indeed the Devil's *Principal Work*, that which may most *emphatically* be so called, is that of having seduced our *First Parents* from their Obedience to their Creator

a Joh. VIII. 44.

b Eph. II. 2.

and Governour, and involved them and all their Posterity, that is, the whole Human Race, in the dreadful Sentence of Condemnation. Man's *Defection* from that *Original Holiness* and Conformity to the Divine Image, in which He came out of his Maker's Hand; His *Loss*, by this means, of that *immortal Life* for which he was designed, had he retained his Innocence; and his becoming liable to both Temporal and Eternal *Death* and Destruction:—These, I say, are almost constantly in *Scripture* ascribed to the *Devil*. ^a *Moses* in His History of the *Fall* expressly introduces *the Serpent* as the Tempter of *Eve* on that Occasion; and this Transaction is alluded to in several Parts of the ^b *New Testament*, particularly by ^c *St. Paul* in more than one of His *Epistles*. But the Author of the Book of *Wisdom* has given us so clear an Account of this Matter, that I need not refer to any other. ^d *God made not Death*, says he, but *created Man to be Immortal, and made him an Image of His own Eternity*: ^e *Nevertheless, through Envy of the Devil came Death into the World; and they that hold of His Side do find it.*

Here then let us *stand still* a little, and reflect, What this *Death* implies, which was

^a Gen. III. 1, &c.

^b 2 Cor. XI. 3.

^c 1 Tim. II. 14.

^d *Wisd.* I. 13.

^e *Ibid.* II. 23, 24.

thus introduced into Man's Nature *through Envy of the Devil*: That we may be able in some Degree to *estimate* the *deplorable Effects* of this *Work of his* in relation to ourselves and all Mankind; — the *exceeding Desirableness* of having this Work *destroyed*, that is, rendered null and void; — and the *unparalleled Love* and Goodness of the *Son of God* in condescending to be *manifested*, under the Circumstances before represented, *for this very Purpose that He might destroy it*.

The *Loss of Innocence*, and the Depravation of our Nature, must itself be an unspeakable Evil. *Guilt* is both naturally and judicially incompatible with That *Rational Happiness*, in which a Sense of the Presence and Favour of Almighty God must ever be an *essential Ingredient*. No sooner had our *First Parent* forfeited His Innocence, but we find Him *hiding Himself from the Presence of the LORD amongst the Trees of the Garden*. Conscious of *Guilt*, He could no more *lift up His Eyes unto Heaven*; and, had not his Creator Himself graciously interposed, *Adam* would probably, as far as was possible, have driven himself into a voluntary Exile *from the Presence of God*, and all those *Comforts* that can only be had from a *Religious Intercourse* with Him. And in this

joyless, comfortless, hopeless State must all his Descendants (if, consistently with the rigorous Execution of the Sentence passed upon him, He could have had any Descendants,) *without a Saviour*, have for ever continued. The Corruption of His Nature must naturally have derived itself upon all His wretched Posterity; the Consequence of which Corruption must have been Sin, and its *inseparable Attendants*, Shame, Misgivings, Despair; and we must all, banished from *Paradise*, have passed through Life as through a *desolate, howling, Wilderness*.

And yet This is not all. To be banished for ever from His Presence, *in whose Presence alone is Fulness of Joy*, is but a Part, but the *Negative* Part, of that Punishment, to which the *Devil* by *corrupting* our Nature had rendered all the *impure* Partakers of it for ever liable. ^a *Our Iniquities must not barely have separated between us and our God, nor our Sins only have hid His Face from us*; but they must justly have exposed us to the Inflictions of His *Wrath* and Vengeance. And how insupportable the Weight, how astonishing the very Apprehension only, of His Wrath and Vengeance must have been, who is *terrible in His Judgments* and ^b *whose Wrath is a consu-*

^a *Isai. LIX. 2.*

^b *Heb. XII. 29.*

ming Fire, — 'tis scarce possible for us, perhaps, even in *Thought* to conceive.

I will not say but that Mankind *might* have sunk (and in fact a great Part of the Species *did sink*) into a State of *brutish* Thoughtlessness about the fatal Consequences of Sin; they might have lost the very *Idea* of Guilt, and become ^a *past Feeling* of the Difference between Good and Evil. But, besides the Disorder, Confusion, and Misery which such a State of Brutality must naturally have introduced, and has actually introduced, wheresoever it has in any Degree prevailed, among Mankind; no one will say, that Men are therefore *secure from* the Divine Vengeance merely because They are *thoughtless* and unconcerned *about* it. — And if, on the other Hand, some *few contemplative* Persons, after having offended God by the Commission of Sin, might have flattered themselves with Hopes that He would, notwithstanding, upon their *sincere Repentance*, at length receive them into Favour: Yet even these Hopes must have been mightily checked by the Fear of *continual Relapses*, and the Consideration of having *done no more*, by forsaking their Sins, towards *regaining* the Divine Favour, than would have been their Duty to do had they never *forfeited* it. But

what Hopes soever Men might have entertained, these could by no means have amounted to any *strong Consolation*, any well-grounded *Assurance*. And even these *Hopes* were entertained by so few, and must have been in those Few so *languid* and *wavering*, that Mankind might well be described as *“sitting in Darknefs and in the Shadow of Death, when
“the Sun of Righteousness arose with Healing in His Wings.*

Imagine then a whole Race of accountable Creatures in this deplorable Situation; some wholly thoughtless and insensible of their Danger, and the rest *grieved and wearied* with the perpetual Apprehension of it; unable to *bear*, yet equally unable to *remove*, the *Burthen of their Sins*:—To be visited by no less a Person than the *Son of GOD Himself, manifesting Himself* among them, in order to *clear up* all their Doubts about the *Possibility* of recovering His Father's Favour; to *mediate* effectually between *offended GOD* and *guilty Man*; to *instruct* Men in the *Terms* required on their Part; and to *assist* them in the *Performance*: Imagine all This, I say, and then tell me, Whether these may not justly be called, *“good Tidings, of great Joy to all People!* Whether

a Luk. I. 79.

b Mal. IV. 2.

c Luk. II. 10.

this be not a ^a*faithful Saying, and worthy of all Acceptation, — That CHRIST Jesus came into the World to save Sinners!*

But I am insensibly *anticipating* what will more properly engage Your Attention the *next* Opportunity; when I hope to go on to the *Third* Head of Enquiry, under which I proposed to consider, “How the *Manifestation of the Son of GOD* is fitted to *destroy the Works of the Devil?*”

In the mean Time; since the *present Season* is wisely set apart for commemorating one of the greatest Blessings that fallen Man was capable of receiving; with good Reason may the ^b*Voice of Joy and Health be in the Dwellings of the Righteous* on such an Occasion; with good Reason may it be observed as a Season of Chearfulness and Rejoycing, of cultivating a friendly Intercourse among Neighbours and Relations, and of ^c*sending Portions to them for whom Nothing is prepared*. But then—Seasons of Chearfulness are Seasons of Danger, and Seasons when we are fatally apt to be off our Guard against it: And it may well become us, at our Entrance upon such an Occasion of Rejoycing as we now have in View, to ask ourselves, *what Sort of Joy does the present Season demand from us?* Not (we

^a 1 Tim. I. 15.

^b Psal. CXVIII. 15.

^c Esth. IX. 22.

may

may be sure) a noisy, and excessive or a riotous Mirth; but a sober, chaste, temperate Joy; a Joy *sui*ted to the *Nature* of the Blessings we profess to commemorate, and calculated to promote and forward the Great Design of our Saviour's coming into the World; at least not to obstruct it, by betraying us into *such Works* as He was manifested on purpose to destroy. Be this Holy Season dedicated to Purposes better adapted to the gracious Design of it: That when ^a *the Days of our Feasting are gone about*, we may look back upon them without having ^b *our Laughter turned to Mourning, or our Joy to Heaviness!*

^a Job I. 5.^b Jam. IV. 9.

S E R M O N IX.

I JOHN III. 8.

— *For this Purpose the Son of GOD was manifested, that He might destroy the Works of the Devil.*

TH E S E Words, containing a short, and yet if duly considered a full, Account of the *great End* and Design of our Blessed Saviour's *Manifestation* in the *Flesh*, may furnish us with Matter very proper to employ our Meditations at a *Season* particularly set apart for the devout Commemoration of this *wonderful Event*. With this View I have accordingly made Choice of them; and proposed to reduce what I had to offer thereupon, under the Four following Heads of Enquiry;

I. Who is here meant by *the Son of GOD*, and what by His being *manifested*?

II. What

II. What we are to understand as here meant by *the Works of the Devil*?

III. How this Manifestation of the *Son of God* is fitted to *destroy these Works*?
And,

IV. What *Uses* we are to make of the Doctrines that may occur under the foregoing Heads.

The Two *former* of these Enquiries have already been considered at large. Under the *First*, I briefly suggested to You the Greatness of the Condescension of the Person here said to be *manifested*, and of His Love to us and all Mankind; I set before You some out of many Proofs, which the Scriptures furnish us with, of His *true* and essential *Divinity*; and also of His *real* and proper *Humanity*; of which *last*, to render His Condescension still more conspicuous, He was pleased to appear in the *lowest* Circumstances, and such as were most slenderly accommodated. And, that the *Greatness* of the *Benefit* redounding to us might appear, as well as the Goodness of our Redeemer in procuring it; I went on, in the *Second* Place, to explain to You, What Those *Works of the Devil* are which He came to destroy; which I told You were, *primarily*, All Those

Those *Acts of Sin* and Wickedness which the Devil tempts and prevails upon us to commit ; and, *secondarily* and by Consequence, All that *Guilt* which is derived upon us, and that *Punishment* to which we become obnoxious, from the Commission of it. Hence I am naturally led to enquire,

III. *Thirdly*, How the Manifestation of the *Son of God* is fitted to answer the gracious Purpose of *Destroying these Works of the Devil* ?

To *destroy the Works of the Devil* is to *counteract* the Operations of that wicked Spirit ; to *annull* all that He has been doing, or to render it of *no lasting Effect* ; or to *remove* all the *Evil* that He has either been working in us, or bringing upon us ; and to recover and *restore* to us all that *Good*, either in Possession or in Prospect, of which He had deprived us : In short, to deliver us *first* from the Habits and *Dominion* of *Sin*, and *then* from the Guilt and *Punishment* of it.

And in *Both* these Respects the *Manifestation of the Son of God* is admirably fitted to answer the various Exigences of our Condition : To deliver us from the *Dominion* of *Sin*, as far as is consistent with the *Freedom of our Nature* ; and to deliver us from the *Punish-*

ment of it in such a Way as is most consistent with the *adorable Perfections* of *His own*. — But to be a little more *particular*.

First then, The *Manifestation* of CHRIST in the Flesh is calculated to *destroy* all *Habits* of Wickedness, and to free us from the *Dominion* of Sin, by engaging us to quit and forsake it. This It doth, not violently or by any *irresistible* Force, but by such Methods as are most proper to work upon *rational* and free Beings. That the Design of our Saviour's Appearance was to deliver us from the Power of Sin by inducing us to cast off the Habits of it, is plain from almost every Page of the *New Testament*: But I need only instance in the very emphatical Words of St. Paul to Titus; *'The Grace of GOD which bringeth Salvation hath appeared to all Men; Teaching us, that denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World.* The *Grace of GOD* in the Gospel (we see) doth *bring Salvation*: But *how*? Not by saving us *IN* our Sins, which is indeed impossible; but by saving us *FROM* our Sins: The very Reason why our ^b LORD was called, JESUS. St. Paul scarce on any Occasion speaks with more Vehemence, than when He mentions a Notion of the most dangerous

^a Tit. II. 11, 12.

^b Matt. I. 21.

Consequence, namely, that Men might the more securely ^a *sin because God's Grace had abounded.*

And indeed, if we consider the *several Transactions* of our Blessed LORD relating to Mankind, from His first Humiliation in taking upon Him our Flesh to His present Exaltation and Mediation for us at GOD's Right-Hand; we shall find in every one of them very powerful Arguments against *Continuance in Sin*, very forcible Incitements to be *fruitful in Good Works*, and to abound in *all Holy Conversation and Godliness*. Nay, so necessary a Part of our Saviour's Design in Coming into the World was the Reformation of Mankind; that we find it the chief Business of His Forerunner St. *John the Baptist* to preach Repentance; and to *prepare the Way* for His Reception by ^b *Turning the Hearts of the Disobedient to the Wisdom of the Just.*

The *Incarnation* and Birth of our LORD is *itself* an irrefragable Proof of the Heinousness of Sin and Wickedness; which could make it necessary for the Son of GOD, Himself equal with the Father, to take upon Him our Nature, in order to save us from the dreadful Consequences of it. — His *unspotted Life* was one continued Reproach to all Sin and Impu-

^a Rom. III. 1.

^b Luk. I. 17.

rity; and His bright Example a most inviting Encouragement to Virtue and Holiness. — His *Doctrine* and *Precepts* all pursue the same End; recommending a most exalted Purity and active Obedience, and banishing all Iniquity and Corruption, not from our *Words* and *Actions* only, but from our very *Thoughts* and *Imaginations*. — But never did He more emphatically *condemn Sin in the Flesh* than when He ^a *poured out His Soul an Offering* for it; when *the LORD laid on Him the Iniquity of us all*; when He, *who knew no Sin* of His own, yet almost fainted and sunk under the Load of imputed Guilt, which He freely took upon Him. — And as His *Death* should teach us to *die unto Sin*, so should we in Conformity to His Resurrection *rise again unto Righteousness*, and in Heart and *Affections* thither ascend ^b *where He sitteth at the Right-Hand of God*. — In short; *for this Purpose* (we may justly say) *the Son of God* was not only at first *manifested*, but lived, conversed, and preached here on Earth; *for this Purpose* He died, rose again, and ascended into Heaven; *that He might destroy the Works of the Devil*; *that He might efface all those Impressions*, which that Enemy of Mankind had made upon our Hearts; *that He might root out of our Minds*

a Isai. LIII. 6, 10.

b Col. III. 1.

all vicious Habits or Inclinations, and in their stead implant every Grace and Virtue.

It was observed under my last Head, that although Sins of *every Kind* are Works of the Devil, yet there are some *special Kinds* or Degrees of Sin, such as *Pride, Hatred of God and Man, Lying, Impurity, and Idolatry*, which are more particularly ascribed to that Apostate Spirit in Holy Scripture, as proceeding from a Disposition of Mind, either nearly resembling his, or under his Influence and Dominion. And I might easily here shew *in every Instance* there recited, how particularly CHRIST has by His Life and Doctrine guarded us against *each* of These, and what Stress is every where laid by Him and His Apostles upon the Cultivation of the opposite Graces and good Qualities. ^a *Learn of me* (says He) *for I am meek and lowly in Heart.* ^b *By This shall all Men know that Ye are my Disciples, if Ye have Love one to another.* How diametrically opposite are these Instructions to that *Pride* and *Malice* which are the Characteristicks of *Satan*, and which He is continually endeavouring to infuse into us? — This Observation might easily be illustrated in every Instance before specified: But I hasten to consider,

^a Matt. XI. 29.

^b Joh. XIII. 35.

Secondly, How the *Manifestation of the Son of God* is calculated to *destroy the Works of the Devil*, in the more *remote* Sense, as that Phrase may be understood of the Effects and Consequences which Sin brings upon us; such as the *Corruption of our Nature*, the Depriving us of that *Immortality* to which we were created, and *subjecting* us to the *Divine Wrath* and Vengeance. For (as I before hinted) all these *Works of the Devil* the Son of God has done His Part towards destroying; as will appear from a short View of the Particulars here suggested.

The *Corruption of our Nature* by the Fall shews itself, partly in the *Darkness* of our Understandings and the *Weakness* of our Intellectual Powers, but chiefly in the *Perverseness* of our Wills, and the *Strength* of our depraved Appetites and Passions. And for *Each* of These our LORD hath provided the most suitable Remedies. For the Enlightening of our *Understandings* He hath favoured us with a gracious *Revelation* of what is convenient for us to know of His own Nature and Will, and of our Relations to Him and to one another; and hath pointed out to us both with Clearness and with Authority our Duties consequent thereupon. Our *Appetites* and *Passions* He doth not, like some *vain* and deceitful *Philosophy*,

osophy, profess to *extirpate*; but engages them on the *Side* of Purity and Holiness by the most *inviting Rewards* on one hand, and the most *awakening Terrors* on the other. And lastly, as to our depraved *Wills*; He doth all that is consistent with our being left *accountable* Creatures, towards restoring them to their *Original Rectitude*, by the gracious Influences of His *Holy Spirit*: Which Influences, operating powerfully, though not always perceivably, are (I conceive) the Principles of that *New Life, Regeneration, Being born again &c.* which are so often mentioned under the *Gospel-Dispensation*: A Life, which commences at our *Baptism*, and is afterwards supported on God's Part by the *ordinary Communications* of Grace, and *cherished* on our Parts by a due Use of those Means which He has instituted; such as *Prayer* both private and Publick, *Hearing His Word*, *Partaking of the Sacrament* in Communion with His Church; together with an *honest Discharge* of the *Offices* of our respective *Callings* and Stations, and a *regular Practice* of all the *Virtues* that adorn the *Christian Profession*; Those ^a *Good Works*, which God hath ordained that We should walk in them.

And let me here just observe, by the Way, that the *Reality* of this New Birth, in *parti-*

^a Eph. II. 10.

cular Persons, may much more safely be judged of, *ordinarily* at least, by the *visible Fruits* it produces in Men's *Lives* and *Conversations*, than by any such *instantaneous Motions* and *inexplicable Feelings*, as have of late been pretended to by Some, and assigned as necessary Tokens and Indications of it. In which Notion we should be the less solicitous to disturb them, were it not as dangerous as it is delusive, both to themselves and others: To *themselves*, whom the supposed Grant of such extraordinary Communications may easily betray into spiritual *Pride*, *Presumption* and *Security*: To *others*, whom the Disappointment may as easily drive into *Dejection* and *Despondency of Mind*, when they do not find themselves favoured with any of those *Experiences*, which they have been taught to expect as the *constant Attendants* upon a *Regenerate State*. — But to return.

From the *Wrath* and *Vengeance* of Almighty God, to which our Sins had justly exposed us, the *Son of God* hath delivered us by His *perfect Obedience*, but especially by the *All-sufficient Sacrifice* of Himself, which He freely offered up *upon the Cross*. The Consideration of those intolerable Pains, and that ignominious Death, which He underwent for this Purpose, may be better suited to *another Season*

son than the present; but I here mention it as one great End of our LORD's Incarnation: It being (as far as we are able to judge) highly proper that the ^a *Mediator between GOD and Man*, should be Partaker of the *Human* as well as the *Divine* Nature; at once *Man* that He might *suffer*, and *GOD* that His Sufferings might have *Merit* enough to atone for our Sins. This is that ^b *Lamb of GOD, who taketh away the Sin of the World*. This is that ^c *Beloved Son, in whom the Father hath declared Himself well-pleased*; and for whose Sake He graciously vouchsafes to be ^d *reconciled* to us, *when wicked Works* (those Works of the Devil) *had made us Enemies unto Him*, and Objects of His heavy but just Displeasure. ^e *There is now no Condemnation to them that are in CHRIST Jesus; to them who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit*.

And to compleat all, the *Son of GOD* hath, by being *manifested*, not only restored us to the Divine Favour, but procured for us at least a full Equivalent for that Blessedness which was forfeited by the Fall. If we lost an *earthly Paradise* by the Transgression of our First Parent, yet by the ^f *Resurrection of CHRIST from the Dead* we are begotten again

^a 1 Tim. II. 5.^b Joh. I. 29.^c Matt. III. 17.^d Col. I. 21.^e Rom. VIII. 1.^f 1 Pet. I. 3, 4.

unto an Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in Heaven for us: Thither our ^a LORD is gone to prepare a Place for us; that, where He is, there we may be also. — Indeed, one Work of the Devil, one Consequence of the Fall, must take Place; ^b it being by an irreversible Decree appointed unto Men once to die. And yet, ^c over Death we have the Victory through our LORD Jesus CHRIST; This last Work of our ^d Enemy He will, in His good Time, destroy; When ^e these Bodies of our's shall be raised from the Grave, and fashioned like unto His glorious Body; When ^f this corruptible shall put on Incorruption, and this Mortal shall put on Immortality.

Thus fully hath the Manifestation of the Son of GOD answered the Purpose of destroying the Works of the Devil: Thus doth He first deliver us from the Power and Dominion, and then from all the destructive Consequences, of our Sins. Our *Understandings* He enlightens by His *Word*, our *Wills* He rectifies by His *Holy Spirit*, and to our *Affections* He addresses the most powerful and engaging *Motives*; He hath reconciled us to His offended Father by the Obedience of His Life and the Sacrifice of His Death; and by His glorious

^a Job XIV. 3. ^b Heb. IX. 27. ^c 1 Cor. XV. 57.
^d Ibid. 26. ^e Phil. III. 21. ^f 1 Cor. XV. 53.

Refurrection and Ascension He hath *opened unto us the Gates of Heaven*. In a Word, He hath compleatly *repaired* all our *Losses* by that *great Work of the Devil*, the *Fall* of our First Parents; having provided a Remedy commensurate to the Evils thereby introduced; that *as in Adam All died, even so in CHRIST All may be made alive*.

Well then might the *Holy Angels*, those Friends to Mankind, use so very *different Forms* as They are represented to have used, upon *Satan's descending* into these lower Regions, and upon our LORD's *Manifestation* in the Flesh. On the former Occasion, "^b woe (say they) to the Inhabitants of the Earth and of the Sea! for the Devil is come down unto You, having great Wrath!" But on the latter, "^c Glory to GOD in the Highest, and on Earth Peace, Good-Will towards Men."

And now, what remains but that we should enquire, and this very briefly, as was proposed,

IV. *Lastly, What Uses it becomes us to make of the Doctrines already delivered? And,*

I. Since, as appeared under my *First Head*, this *Son of GOD*, who hath done so much for

^a 1 Cor. XV. 22,

^b Rev. XII. 12.

^c Luk. II. 14.

us Men and for our Salvation, is Himself GOD as well as *Man*; let us with Gratitude receive and acknowledge Him under *both* those Characters: Neither presumptuously questioning the *Truth*, because We do not comprehend the *Manner*, of this *Mystery of Godliness*, the Union of Two such infinitely *distant* Natures; nor lessening our Notions of our Saviour's *Condescension*, and of Course our *Gratitude* for it, by denying the *Reality* of *either* of these Natures in His Person; the *Divine*, which He *had from Everlasting*; or the *Human*, which He assumed for our Sakes. Let us *love* Him as our *Brother*, *praise* Him as our *Redeemer*, *obey* Him as our *Master*, and *adore* Him as our GOD.

2. Since the Devil hath been the Author and Occasion of so much *Disorder* in our *Nature*, hath introduced so much *Evil* and *Misery* into the *World*; what can be a more natural Inference, than that we should always consider him as *our worst Enemy*, and (as much as in us lies) renounce all Intercourse and Communication with Him. This is an Inference by no means unsuitable to the present Season: A Season in which we have great Reason to commemorate with Joy and Gladness of Heart, our Blessed LORD's unparalleled *Goodness* in giving us the *Victory* over that
grand

grand Adversary of Mankind. But, should we *prostitute* this Holy Season so abominably, as to make it an *Occasion* for indulging ourselves in any of Those *Works of Darknes* which tend to advance the Interests of his *Infernal Kingdom*! What an ^a *Advantage* would Satan by this means *get over us*! What a *Triumph* should we give him over our own Souls, and, as far as in us lay, over our dear Redeemer Himself! But lastly;

3. Since the *Son of GOD* was manifested for this very Purpose that He might destroy the *Works of the Devil*; the great Inference of all is, that we should beware lest ^b we receive the *Grace of GOD* in vain; and lest this merciful Design should be *frustrated* by our *Neglect*. For, notwithstanding all that the Son of GOD hath done for us, we shall find ourselves dreadfully mistaken, if we sit still, imagining we have Nothing to do for ourselves. CHRIST hath indeed put us in a *Capacity* of being saved; but saved we must be, not like *mere Machines* without any Intention or Endeavours on our Part, but like *Rational and Free Beings*. If we continue in the Habits, and under the Dominion, of Sin, in vain shall we expect that CHRIST will deliver us from the Curse of it: So far otherwise, that this Offer

a 2 Cor. II 11.

b Ibid. VI. 1.

of *Salvation* having been thus profanely *neglected*, will serve only to aggravate our Guilt, and encrease our Condemnation.

May We all then *thankfully receive This inestimable Benefit*, and chearfully cooperate with the gracious Purpose of the Son of GOD, by putting away from us all Evil and Impurity, and ^a *departing* (as *every one that nameth the Name of CHRIST should depart*) from *Iniquity*! May we answer the Design of His Coming into the World, ^b *who gave Himself for us, that He might not only redeem us from all Iniquity, but purify unto Himself a peculiar People, Zealous of Good Works*!

a 2 Tim. II. 19.

b Tit. II. 14.

S E R M O N X.

J E R E M I A H XLV. 5.

*Seekest Thou Great Things for Thyself?
Seek them not. —*

IF there *be* yet remaining in the Mind of Man an Affection worthy of Its high Extraction, or capable of producing Fruits beneficial and praise-worthy; it is *This*, which may here seem to be discountenanced and condemned. To a Desire of *Great Things*, Things either *really* Great or *apprehended* to be such, the World has, in fact, all along been indebted for most of the *Good Things* done in it. Where this Passion is over-powered in the Breasts of *particular Persons*, every generous Sentiment decays, every manly Pursuit is neglected, in Proportion. And, in Truth, scarce would ** the Preeminence of a Man above a Beast* be worth asserting, were every Tendency towards *Great Things* quite lost

* Eccl. III. 19.

from among us ; — were the *erect Posture* of our *Bodies* no longer accompanied by a *suitable Elevation* of our *Souls*.

And yet (so closely is *Danger* connected with *Privilege* in our very Constitution !) there is no Inlet into the Mind of Man, by means whereof our great Adversary has, from the Beginning, gained a more easy or more fatal *Advantage* against us, than This. — “^a *Ye shall be as Gods,*” said he to our Parents in Paradise ; and so well did the flattering Offer succeed with the *First Adam*, that he seems to have laid the chief Stress on a Proposal of the like Sort in his Attempt upon the *Second*. The Display of ^b *all the Kingdoms of the Earth and the Glory of them*, was indeed withstood by HIM, who had voluntarily quitted an unspeakably greater ^c *Glory which He had with His Father before the World was*. But the Tempter’s Measures were otherwise well laid ; and proved more successful upon some of our LORD’s earliest Followers : For we soon find Two of them petitioning to ^d *fit, the one on His Right-Hand, the other on His Left-Hand in His Kingdom*. And, so jealous were the *other Apostles* of any Encroachment upon *their Rank and Precedence*, that ^e *when the Ten*

^a Gen. III. 5.

^b Matt. IV. 8, 9, &c.

^c Joh. XVII. 5.

^d Matt. XX. 21.

^e Ibid. 24, 25, &c.

heard it, they were moved with Indignation against the Two Brethren. Nor could the most affectionate Cautions, given upon This and other Occasions, prevent ^a *a Love to have the Pre-eminence* from very early infesting the *Christian Church.* And (I suppose) I need not here expatiate on the many Schisms and Heresies, the Parties and Factions, the Oppressions and Persecutions, which have ever since been *springing up* from the same *Root of Bitterness.* As to the *Kingdoms of this World;* the Histories of all Ages are filled with Accounts of the Commotions raised and the Mischiefs done in particular Countries, by the Intrigues of aspiring Statesmen; and the more extensive Ravages, the *Destructions brought upon the Earth,* when the same Spirit has actuated its Princes.—In short, *Ambition* is the Snare, into which the *active* Part of Mankind are always most easily betrayed: And we may say in *This,* with St. James in a like Case; ^b *if a Man offend not, in seeking Great Things, the same is a perfect Man.*

The Regulation of an Affection so extensive in its Influence, and so interesting in its Effects, must needs be of considerable Importance; not only in respect of the Innocence of *particular* Persons, but the Peace of Socie-

^a 3 Joh. 9.^b Jam. III. 2.

ties and the Happiness of *Mankind*. And, I trust therefore, an Attempt for this Purpose will be the more favourably excused; though I should only bring to Your Remembrance a few plain Truths, by Way of *adjusting* the *Extent*, and (under due Restrictions) *recommending* the *Observance* of the Advice in my Text; *Seekest Thou Great Things for Thyself? Seek them not.*

The Caution, in its most *obvious* Meaning, has been thought but little suited to the Occasion upon which it was given. *Baruch*, to whom it is here addressed, seems to have been in Circumstances by no Means calling for any Check of this Kind; having lately, after writing from *Jeremiah's* Mouth a severe Denunciation of Divine Judgments impending on his Country, and *reading it in the Ears of all the Princes*, found it necessary to *hide himself* from the Resentment and declared Vengeance of King *Jehoiakim*. And, what *Temptation* to form *ambitious* Projects *here*? What Room to expect *Great Things*? Or, what Need of Diffuasives from the Pursuit of them? Hence Commentators have endeavoured to assign some more probable Interpretation. But, without detaining You with an Enumeration of their various Conjectures, I shall take Leave to con-

^a Jer. XXXVI. 8, 15, 19, 26, &c.

^b Ibid. XLV. 1.

sider the Words in their plain and obvious Sense. How unpromising soever *Baruch's* present Situation might be, his Desire of one more advanced was not perhaps *wholly* extinguished: Or, however, though he could scarce hope to rise to any ^a *Great Things*, he might be (and his Complaints make it probable that he was) *fretful* and impatient on account of the Want of them. And in This View, the Passage before us conveys to him at once Comfort under his present Condition and Instruction for his future Conduct. “^a *Behold*
 “ (saith God by his Prophet) ^b *that which I*
 “ *have built I will pull down, and that which*
 “ *I have planted I will pluck up; even this*
 “ *whole Land. And, seekest Thou Great Things*
 “ *for Thy self?* Doth thy Heart still run out
 “ after Exaltation and Dignity, Pre-eminence
 “ and Power? Know, that, in Times of pub-
 “ lick Calamity, a safe Retreat, a contented
 “ Privacy, is a Situation far more desirable.
 “ And this is still in thy Option: For, though
 “^c *I will bring evil upon all Flesh, yet Thy*
 “ *Life will I give unto Thee for a Prey in all*
 “ *Places whither thou goest.* Turn therefore
 “ thy Complaints of thy Obscurity into Thank-
 “ fulness for thy Preservation. Learn to con-
 “ tract thy Wishes and to suit them to thy

^a Jer. XLV. 3.^b Ibid. 4.^c Ibid. 5.

“Circumstances : And, when thou canst so
 “little hope to obtain *Great Things*, or to
 “do Good with them if obtained, *seek them*
 “not.”

The Advice, thus understood, appears to have been a *prudential Caution* given to a *particular* Person upon a *special* Occasion : And therefore, however delivered in *general* Terms, need not be considered as an *absolute Prohibition*, extending itself to *all* Persons, on *every* Occasion whatsoever. I shall therefore endeavour,

- I. *First*, To explain the real Import, and to adjust the Extent, of the Advice itself.
- II. *Secondly*, To illustrate the Reasonableness of it so explained and limited. And then,
- III. *Thirdly*, To apply the Considerations before offered to the Regulation of our Practice.

I. Now by *Great Things* may, in General, be understood any of *Those Advantages* in an *eminent Measure* or Degree, on Account of which Men are pleased with themselves, or respected by others.

But, are we, then, allowed to *seek none* of these ? Can an *Ambition to excell* be, in itself,

self, blameable or criminal? No, surely; but rather the contrary: At least, like other Affections in a *Moral* Estimate, *This* must take its Denomination from *Circumstances*; such as the *Quality* of its *Object*, and the *Means* and *Intention* with which it is exerted. — To be a little more particular.

The superiour Advantages now under Consideration may be, either such as are *inherent* in us and (as it were) *Parts of ourselves*; or such as are *extrinsecal* and *adventitious* to us.

And *First*, Among *Great Things* of the *Former* Kind, Those of the *Body* may, I suppose, be set aside as foreign to the present Enquiry: Because, though Bodily Advantages, as *Health*, *Strength*, &c. may not only, in their *proper Order*, deserve our Care, but be capable also of being, in *some Measure*, improved by it; yet, the *eminent Degrees* of them are confessedly out of the Reach of our Endeavours; it not being in any Man's Power, were it worth his Study, ^a *by taking Thought to add one Cubit to his Stature*.

But the *Great Things* of the *Understanding* are better fitted, at once to *answer* and to *reward* the Pains of a regular Pursuit: And *these*, we may be sure, cannot *in themselves* be an improper Object of the Attention and

^a Matt. VI. 27.

Search of Rational Beings: So far otherwise, that *high Attainments* in Learning must needs be ornamental and commendable wheresoever they are found; but must be Qualifications necessary to be found in Persons, ^a *at whose Mouths the People are to seek Information* in any Branch of Science, and *whose Lips should accordingly Keep Knowledge*. More especially must *They* incur the Imputation of *Folly*, in the Sight both of God and Man; who, by the Munificence of Those that have gone before them, enjoy the invaluable Opportunity of a liberal and *learned Education*, if, when *there is*, as it were literally, ^b *a Price put into their Hands to get Wisdom*, They should be found to *have no Heart to it*.

“Whether the Cultivation of our *Intellectual Powers* in This *imperfect State* will, even *naturally*, be of considerable Advantage to our *glorified Spirits* in taking in Those larger Measures of *Knowledge* which will *hereafter* be communicated to them,” (as has been argued by some) I presume not to say. Thus much we are sure of, because thus much we *feel*, that *Truth* is, by the present Constitution of our Natures, an Object as agreeable to the *Eye* of our *Minds* as *Light* is to *That* of our *Bodies*. And justly might we

^a Mal. II. 7.^b Prov. XVII. 16.

from *hence* have concluded, that a *Love of Truth* must be *approved* by the Great Author of our Faculties, and a laborious Pursuit of *eminent Degrees* of it proportionably *rewardable* by Him; though the ^a *extensive Learning* of *Moses*, the accurate ^b *Skill in Natural Productions* of *Solomon*, and the ^c *Eloquence* of *Apollon*, had not been recorded with *Commendation*; nor the *forcible Reasoning* and the other *illustrious Accomplishments* of *St. Paul* exemplified, in Those ^d *Scriptures*, which were given by the *Inspiration of God*.

Not but that the Caution in my Text may profitably be applied to the Case now before us. — For, *Seekest Thou the Great Things* of Knowledge and Erudition? Dost Thou, in Confidence of thy own Industry and Abilities, ^e *haste to rise up early and late take Rest, and eat the Bread of Carefulness*; without ever applying for a Blessing to that ^f *Father of Lights, from whom This and every Good Gift cometh*? Art Thou so wholly intent upon enriching thy Mind with *speculative Science*, as to neglect the Acquisition of Things *far greater*, such as Goodness of Temper, Singleness of Heart, Purity of Affections, and the like; which are, even at present, incomparably more valuable and or-

a Acts VII. 22.

b 1 Kin. IV. 30, &c.

c Acts VIII. 24.

d 2 Tim. III. 16.

e Psal. CXXVII. 2.

f Jam. I. 17.

namental; and which, when ^a *Prophecy shall fail, when Tongues shall cease, when* (what we now account) *Knowledge shall vanish away*, we are assured, shall *never fail*? Or, being ^b *zealous of superiour Gifts, seekest Thou to excell*, in order to serve the Purposes of Vanity and Ostentation, by combating established Doctrines, or pulling down established Characters, rather than to promote the Glory of God, *the Edifying of His Church*, and the Benefit of Mankind? Dost thou, in *this* Manner, or for *such* Ends as These, *seek the Great Things* of the Understanding? *Seek them not.*

Again: If we pass on to Advantages *extrinsecal* to us; the Caution in the Text must not be understood as discouraging *all* Endeavours to *advance our Credit and Reputation* in the World; much less as condemning *all* Concern for the *Good Opinion* of others. Man is not only an *intelligent* but a *social* Being: Nor is the *Discovery of Truth* more agreeable to him in the former Capacity than a *Consciousness of the Esteem* of those about him is in the latter. *Reputation* is, in fact, the *great Instrument* by which a Man is capable either of receiving any Good from the World, or of doing any Good in it. His most generous Designs will be thwarted, his best Actions

a a Cor. XIII. 8.

b Ibid. XIV. 12.

suspected,

suspected, his most friendly Advices and tenderest Reproofs misconstrued and at best slighted, unless his Person be esteemed and his Character revered. So valuable a Property, then, as a *Good-Name*, may well deserve to be guarded with Care: Nay we may surely be allowed to *seek* for *eminent* Degrees of *Regard* from those about us, in order to be of more *eminent Advantage* to them.

These Considerations, to which many others might be added, recommend the Care of Reputation to *all Christians* in General. Need I observe, with what *peculiar* Force they plead for a Degree of Tenderneſs, and even *Jealousy* of it, in Those *Orders* or Those *Societies* of Christians, who are, from the Nature of their Profession or the End of their Institution, ^a *the Salt of the Earth*; and are *as such* concerned, by Example as well as Instruction, to promote Virtue and Piety among Mankind. *To such* are the Exhortations of our LORD and His Apostles *more eminently* applicable; — to ^b *let their Light shine before Men*; to ^c *provide honest Things not only in the Sight of the LORD but also in the Sight of Men*; ^d *to abstain from all Appearance*, as well as actual Commission, of Evil. Their Usefulness to the Publick de-

^a Matt. V. 13.

^b Ibid. 16.

^c 2 Cor. VIII. 21.

^d 1 Theſſ. V. 22.

pende so greatly on the Esteem they stand in with the Publick, that *they* must be, not only ^a *careful to maintain Good Works*, but watchful ^b *lest their Good be evil-spoken of*. Much Regard must by *them* be paid to the *Sentiments*, some even to the *Prejudices*, of those they have to do with. Something more than might otherwise be necessary, will at *certain Seasons* become expedient, in order to ^c *cut off Occasion from Those who desire Occasion*. ^d *For so is the Will of God, that with well-doing Ye may put to Silence the ignorant Clamours of the unthinking, and remove the Suspicions of mis-informed Men*.

Yet here also some Use may be made of the Caution under our Consideration. For, *seekest Thou* the reputed *Great Things* of extensive *Fame*, of popular *Acclamations*, of *Vain-Glory*? Art Thou anxiously ^e *fearful of the Reproaches of Men*, and eargerly solicitous that ^f *all Men should speak well of Thee*? Dost Thou, in Consequence of this, meanly attempt to recommend thyself, to the *Multitude* by low and trifling *Qualifications*; to *Bad Men* of *higher Rank*, by base *Flattery* and *fordid Compliances*; and to *Mankind* in general by a *vain Affectation* of *appearing*, rather than a

a Tit. III. 8.

b Rom. XIV. 16.

c 2 Cor. XI. 12.

d 1 Pet II. 15.

e Isai. LI. 7.

f Luk. VI. 26.

real Endeavour to be, Good. Dost Thou not only in Things indifferent accommodate Thyself to the Prejudices, but in Things ^a unlawful conform to the Course, of This World? Art Thou, in short, more studious to secure ^b the Praise of Men than the Praise of GOD; and ready upon Occasion, to ^c please Men even at the Expence of thy Allegiance to CHRIST? Dost Thou thus seek the Great Things of Fame and Popularity? — Seek them not.

Once more: Though the Caution before us most properly respects the Great Things of Power and Grandeur, high Titles and exalted Stations; yet neither is every Desire of This Kind absolutely or without Exception condemned by it. Magistracy and Dominion in the Civil Society are indispensably necessary to preserve any tolerable Order or Happiness among Men; and as necessary are Authority and Rule in the Society spiritual to answer the Ends of its Institution among Christians: And accordingly, ^d Power is declared to be the Ordinance of GOD in the former; and, by the Appointment of its Divine Founder, there are ^e Governments as well as Helps set or constituted in the latter. Now in all Governments there must be a Distinction of Stations: Some must

a Rom. XII. 2.

b Joh. XII. 43.

c Gal. I. 10.

d Rom. XIII. 2.

e 1 Cor. XII. 28.

preside, as well as others be *in Subjection*; and (we may be sure) what some must execute, it cannot be the Duty of All to decline. — The Truth is, the *same* GOD, who hath made a Subordination of Offices necessary for the Purposes of Society, doth also *endow* different Persons with Abilities *respectively suited* to the Administration of each. And, should Men thus entrusted, instead of being ready to employ their *Talents* for the Purposes for which they were given, resolve to *bury them* in an inactive and useless Retirement: Should They, out of Apprehension of Danger, or Fondness of Ease, but especially out of Sullenness or Sourness of Temper, refuse to engage in any Publick Office, when their *Assistance* is *wanted*, and They *regularly called upon* to give it: Such a Conduct, far from being commendable, could hardly be excusable: It would be *withholding* from the *Community* that Share of Service which every Community hath a Right to expect from its Members: It would be *deserting* the Post assigned them by *Providence*: And must stand condemned at once by *Reason* and *Revelation*; which agree in assuring us, that as *we are not born for ourselves alone*, so ^a *none of us liveth, or ought to live, unto himself*.

^a Rom. XIV. 7.

There is no *Wheel* in the Machine of Government so inconsiderable, but that it requires to be *properly moved*; no *Office* in the Community so low, but that it is of Consequence to the Whole to have it *well executed*. More particularly necessary, then, must it be, that the *higher Offices*, the more important Trusts, should be conducted with Integrity and Abilities equal to the Eminence and Importance of them. Much has often depended, and in the Nature of Things must depend, at *critical Seasons* especially, upon the Advancement of Men of This Character. Besides the other Ends of Providence served by the Promotion of ^a *Joseph* in the Court of *Pharaoh*, of how great Moment were the Services he was thereby enabled to perform, not only to *that Prince*, but (I will venture to add, notwithstanding the Suggestions of *prophane Wits* or *superficial Reasoners*) to the *whole People of Egypt*. Thus again, the *Jews* (under God) owed their Deliverance from utter Extirpation to the seasonable Advancement of *Esther* to the Throne of *Abasuerus*. And, when she seemed willing to be excused from exerting her Influence in so dangerous an Exigency, the Expostulation of *Mordecai* deserves

a Gen. XLII, &c.

our Notice; “*Who knoweth, whether Thou art come to the Kingdom for such a Time as This?*” The Great Governour of the Universe raiseth up *extraordinary Instruments* for *extraordinary Emergencies*; upon which should the Persons so pointed out refuse to engage, they would (as far as in them lay) *counter-act* the Designs of Providence, and have Reason to fear, they *might haply be found even to fight against God*.

But then *here* most especially applicable is the Caution in the Text; because *here* we shall be most in Danger of *falling*. Our Pursuit of the *Great Things* of This World *may* on various Accounts become blameable and criminal; and it certainly *will* be such, “if we *Seek* any of them *purely for their own Sakes*;” “if we *seek* Those of them, *to which our Abilities are not equal*;” “if we *seek* Those, for which we are qualified, *by Methods indirect and dishonourable*;” or even, “if in the Use of *fair Means* we are *impatient of Delays*, and *fretful against others* that prove more *successful*.” — *Seekest Thou* then, in any of These Ways, to raise thyself to a Situation of Eminence and Dignity? Dost Thou, in particular, make Honour and Promotion thy *chief Aim*, thy *proper End*; pursuing it, not in or-

der to promote the *Glory of God*, and the Good of Mankind, but merely to *aggrandize*, or (which is yet a *meaner View*) to *enrich* thyself, or (which is still the meanest of all) to *make Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lusts thereof*?—Or, *over-rating* thy own Abilities, dost Thou aspire to Offices of Trust or Power *without the Qualifications* requisite for discharging them with Credit to thyself and Advantage to others?—Or, instead of *entering in by the Door* of real Merit and Usefulness to the Publick, dost Thou attempt to *climb up some other Way*, by the various Arts of Circumvention and Detraction, of Flattery and Prostitution?—Or, art Thou *peevish* and *querulous* upon every Disappointment of Thy, otherwise lawful, Pursuits, importunate and clamorous against Those, who are *able to promote Thee to Honour*, and *envious* against others, who *step in before Thee*?—*Seekest Thou thus the Great Things* of Station and Pre-eminence? *Seek them not.*

Let me just observe farther; that, if the Caution before us leaves Room for the *Exercise*, and even the *Desire*, of Power and Authority, in Persons *duly qualified* for, and *regularly called* to, them; it must also for the same Reason, allow of such *outward Marks of Distinction* as may be necessary to secure the
very

very Ends, for which Power and Authority themselves are instituted among Men. The *Greatest Things* of this World are, in truth, so *little*, that there is Need of much Art to *conceal* their real Condition, and by a Kind of *borrowed Greatness* to conciliate a proper Veneration from Those who most want to be awed by them. Hence even *Wise Men*, when in Authority, how much soever they may *despise* all Pomp and Pageantry, will, notwithstanding, *submit* to the Use of something of This Kind: At the same Time amidst the Splendour, guarding against *the Pride, of Life*: Always remembering, that the *brightest Ornaments* of a high Station are of a different Kind: — That, to answer the Character of a *worthy Magistrate*, they must ^a *put on Righteousness* and let it *cloath* them, whilst *Judgement* must be unto them as a *Robe* and a *Dia-dem*: And, that even *Sacredness* of Profession, added to *Dignity* of Station, will after all be insufficient, without *Sanctity* of Manners, to render ^b *the Garment of Holiness* truly honourable.

Upon the Whole: The Desire condemned in the Text, is not a Desire of any Thing *perfective* of our Nature, or *suit*ed to the *Dignity* of it; nor yet of any Thing necessary to

^a Job XXIX. 14.

^b Ecclus. L. 11.

preserve the *Order*, or to promote the *Happiness*, of the World about us: In other Words, the Desire of *Great Things* is not *in itself* discountenanced, but only in the *Misapplication* or the *Misconduct* of it. How *justly* it is, in this View, discountenanced, may appear from considering,

II. *Secondly*, The *Reasonableness* of the *Advice* before us, as now explained and limited.

The *Two principal* Objects of a wise Man's Concern, so far, I mean, as relates to *himself*, will (I suppose) be allowed to be, "*an easy and safe Passage through this short Life*:" and, "*a secure Reversion of Happiness in the endless Life to come*." And should not only the *irregular Pursuit*, but the very *Possession*, of the *Great Things* under Consideration appear likely to expose *both these* Interests to no small Hazard; the Point before us will, I presume, want no farther Illustration. — Let us see then,

First, How the Case stands with regard to a Man's quiet and comfortable *Passage through the present Life*.

He that affects to be greatest of All, must generally *be*, for some considerable Time at least, *the Servant of All*: In This Service ma-

ny Humours must be gratified, many tedious Attendances given, perhaps many little Things done. Nor is this only an *irksome* but an *invidious* Employment: No sooner is a Man perceived to have *raised* his Views, but the *Jealousies* of all about him are alarmed; and his *Opposers* will probably be still more numerous than his *Competitors*: For, in this Contest it frequently becomes necessary, not only to counter-act the Efforts of Those who contend for the same Prize, but to guard against the wanton Malice of the, otherwise unconcerned, Spectators: Whilst there is scarce any of them so insignificant as not to be able, by some ill Office or other, to retard the Progress, if not wholly to defeat the Pretensions of a *rising* Man. — And how discouraging must be the Attempt, to work through the combined Opposition of Sourness and Malevolence, of Competition and Envy! What a Temptation This, were a Man's *own Security* and Satisfaction to be his *only Concern*, instead of wishing to be *spoken for to the King or to the Captain of the Host*, to chuse to *dwell among his own People*?

Let us, however, *suppose* these and the like Difficulties surmounted, and the Ambitious Man's Wishes happily accomplished. But, why do I say, *happily*? Honour and Exalta-

tion may be obtained, and yet *real Happiness* at as great a Distance as ever: In respect of *This*, he may be, and generally is, as much *disappointed* in (what is *called*) the *Success*, as he could have been by the Failure of his Projects. Pomp and Grandeur *appear large*, and fill the Eye, when viewed *at a Distance*; but, contrary to other Objects of Sight, *grow less* in proportion to the *Nearness* of our *Approach* to them. Indeed an elevated Situation is too *airy* to furnish out any *solid* Entertainment to the Mind of Man; and the Mind of the Man, that is most in Love with it, is often of so *peculiar* a Cast, that the small Satisfaction, which his Acquisitions might otherwise afford him, lies at the Mercy of every one that comes in his Way: They, who *could not* perhaps *hinder* his Advancement, may however by an Omission of Ceremony, especially by a settled Refusal of Respect, more than sufficiently *embitter* his Enjoyment of it. Be *Haman* distinguished by Marks of Royal Favour never so uncommon; yet ^a *all these shall avail him nothing so long as he sees Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's Gate*, without paying to Him the usual Tokens of Respect and Reverence. How little to be envied must a Man of This Turn of Mind be, even in the most

^a Esth. V. 13.

exalted Station ; whilst he is more dependent upon his *supposed* Inferiours for *their* Tribute of Homage and Veneration, then They *can be* upon *him* for his Countenance or Favour.

But, were the Possession of Honours and high Offices more satisfactory than it usually is, yet the *Precariousness* of the *Tenure* must make considerable *Abatements* from the *Value* of the *Purchase*. Of *This* we need go no farther for an Instance than to the Person just mentioned ; who, from ^a *having his Seat above all the Princes about King Abasuerus*, was suddenly dragged to the ignominious Execution which ^b *he had prepared* for his *Adversary*. Royal Favour has in all Ages been complained of, for its very uncertain Duration : And the *Breath of the Populace*, in Countries thought to enjoy more Freedom, is perhaps still less to be relied on. And indeed, ^c *Man being in Possession of Honour* has generally *less Understanding*, less Caution and Circumspection about him, than whilst only *in Pursuit* of it. Hence he is betrayed into *more numerous* Instances of Misconduct, and These at once *more conspicuous* and *less favourably* observed. Now the Removal from an high Degree of Power or Popularity, though a very *easy* and *quick* Descent, is generally *far enough* from being a

^a Esth. III. 1.

^b Ibid. VII. 10.

^c Psal. XLIX. 20.

delight-

delightful one. Though the *Possession of Great Things* can hardly yield Pleasure, yet the *Parting with* them is abundantly sufficient to administer Pain. The *Enjoyment* is *Vanity*, the *Loss Vexation of Spirit*.

Such is the Provision which Ambition usually makes for the Ease and Comfort of its Votaries in *This World* !

But perhaps, after all, the Hazard and Pains, which I have been briefly describing, may, if successful, contribute towards securing our *more important* Interests, and advancing our Happiness in That Part of our Existence, which will have *no End* : And, *if so*, how great soever our Toil and Vexation for the present may be, it will, at worst, *soon be over* ; and we are justified to ourselves in willingly undergoing it, as being, *on This Supposition*, not only tolerable but eligible. — This, however, is a Point of too great Moment to be *taken for granted*. Let us then proceed to enquire,

Secondly, How the *Great Things* of *This World* may be thought likely to affect our Views of *Happiness in another*.

Now thus much may, I presume, be laid down as certain ; that no Station of God's *Appointment* can be, *in itself*, Evil, and *as such absolutely* to be avoided by ourselves, or con-

demned in others : So that, with regard to Promotion *abstractedly* considered, the Apostle's Direction on another Occasion may not improperly be applied ; ** Let not him, that accepteth, despise him that accepteth not ; and let not him, that accepteth not, judge him that accepteth.* The Truth is, Our Condition hereafter will not be finally determined from our Situation, but from our Behaviour, here. And, in Reference to the Point before us at present, great Distinction should be made, because there is in fact a wide Difference, between the Case of Those Persons on the one hand, who are regularly advanced to Offices of Eminence and Power, and their's on the other, who with Eagerness and Impetuosity, perhaps by Treachery or Violence, press into them. If the Former should encounter Difficulties, they are however upon Duty ; and, after using their own honest Endeavours, may humbly rely upon the Aids of Divine Grace for their Support, and the favourable Allowances of Divine Mercy for their Defects, in the Performance. Whereas the Latter, by running without being sent, make themselves wholly answerable for Consequences : And, as they are following their own Devices, They may justly be left, by their own Wisdom and Strength, to stand or

a Rom. XIV. 3.

fall.—But, in *how hazardous* a Situation they must then be, a few Words may sufficiently illustrate.

And here, the *various Temptations* which lye in the Way to *Greatness* might very properly come under Consideration. But I pretend not to *enumerate*, much less to enlarge upon, *These*; neither indeed will the Time permit me to do more than just touch upon a *few* of *Those Sins*, which too easily beset the Possessors of it.—Such are *Luxury* and *Intemperance*, with all that Train of Ills, natural and moral, which usually attend upon them: *These Vices*, it is true, are *not peculiar* to exalted Stations; they address themselves to us where we are in general but weakly guarded: But then, to Persons of *high Rank* and studious of *Popularity*, they put on the Air of necessary Virtues, and come recommended under the advantageous Names of Hospitality and Magnificence.—Such again are *Pride* and *Self-Conceit*; with which the Applauses of Sycophants are perpetually puffing up Men in Power and Affluence; whilst *These* have but little Leisure, and perhaps still less Inclination, to correct such Impressions by *communing profitably with their own Hearts*.—Such also are *Insolence* and *Haughtiness towards Inferiours* in general, and *Want of Feeling* for the Distresses

Distresses of the afflicted Part of them ; which the ^a *Nature of Things* teaches us to expect from Greatness accompanied with Self-Indulgence ; and which have accordingly in all Ages been observed in Those who *fare sumptuously every Day*, and *anoint themselves with the chief Ointments*. — But such, above all, is a dangerous *Forgetfulness of God*, and a fatal *Neglect of the Concerns of another World*. The Great and Powerful are so beset with the Solicitations, so encompassed by the Incense, offered up to *them* by their *Fellow-Creatures*, that the very Thought of presenting *their own* to their Great Creator cannot, without some Difficulty, gain Admittance : Amidst the Crowd of ^b *many Things about which they are careful and troubled*, the *one Thing needful* is from Time to Time dismissed to some *more convenient Season* ; 'till at Length their *Affection* becomes fixed on Those Objects, which have so long *engrossed their Attention*. *This is a sore Evil under the Sun*. Were *high Life* (as it is sometimes called) exposed to no other Inconvenience or Snare besides *This*, surely no wise Man would with Importunity *thrust himself* upon a Station of so much Danger.

^a Comp. Luke XVI. 19, &c. and Amos VI. 6.
X. 40, 41.

^b Luk.

And yet, Pre-eminence and Power, at the same Time that They thus *endanger* a Man's *Virtue*, do also *heighten* his *Obligations to exemplary Degrees* of it. In Proportion as his Situation is *advanced*, his Sphere of Activity is *extended*, and the Compass of his Duty *enlarged*. Nor are his Obligations rendered more numerous only, but (with regard to *others* at least) more strict and *indispensable*. For, though God *has given no Man Licence to sin*, what Persons of inferiour Rank do, is *comparatively* of little Moment to the World about them: Their Actions are *known* to few, and *imitated* by yet fewer; and the Consequences rarely spread farther than that *small Circle* by which they are circumscribed. Whereas the *Motions* of Persons in an *higher Orbit* are *seen* and attended to, and their Influences *felt*, by All. The Behaviour of Great Men, every Thing they say or do, may have very *extensive Consequences*: On *their* Advice and Influence not only the *Morals* and *Happiness* of a few, but the *Good-Order* of *Kingdoms*, and (which is of still higher Moment) the Advancement of *true Religion*, and the *Salvation of Souls*, may often very much depend. And how awful a Situation is This! how little to be courted! rather how much to be dreaded! especially when we look forward to that *Great Day*,
when

when Authority and Influence must, among other *Talents*, be *strictly accounted for* ! when ^a *a sharp Judgment, a severe Scrutiny, shall be on them that have been in high Places ; and mighty Men, if not proportionably exemplary, shall be mightily tormented !*

So far then, we see, *may* the Pains we take in Pursuit of Honour and Advancement be from *forwarding* us in the more important *Race that is set before us* ; that our very Success in the Former will lay an Additional *Weight* upon us in regard to the Latter : It will multiply and *strengthen our Temptations* to Sin, whilst it enlarges and *enforces our Obligations* to Duty : At once *adding* to our *Danger*, and (in Case of Miscarriage) *increasing our Condemnation*.

But if, for Men in Power and Authority, it be at the same Time so very difficult to ^b *keep themselves pure*, so almost unavoidable to *become Partakers of other Men's Sins* ; it may be asked with regard to the *Powerful*, as it once was concerning the *Rich*, “ ^c *Who then can be saved?* ” And the Answer must be the same that was then given, “ *With God all Things are possible*. When *Providence* placeth Men in any Station, They may, if not wanting to themselves, depend upon receiving *Sup-*

^a Wild. VI. 5, 6. ^b 1 Tim. V. 22. ^c Matt. XIX. 25, 26.
plies

plies suited to the *necessary Demands* of it. The hazardous Nature of any Service is a good Reason against *rushing into* it eagerly and without just Occasion: But where *Duty* calls, the Consideration of ^a *Danger* must be *regulated* by it. The Prophet *Jonas* ran into greater Danger by *flying from* a Commission with which God had entrusted him, than he *could* have exposed himself to by a *cheerful Execution* of it. — In short, We may, with ^b *Agur*, deprecate the *Two Extremes*, in respect of *Honour* as well as *Riches*; and, I hope, enough has been said to illustrate the Prudence, *ordinarily* at least, of so doing. But our Prayers, and our other Endeavours, should always be employed with entire Resignation to *His Will*, who hath a Right to dispose of us in His own Way; and who best knows, how to place us in a Situation, as well as to *feed us with Food, convenient for us*. Which Reflection will enable us, as was proposed,

III. *Thirdly*, To *apply* the Considerations already offered, to the *Regulation of our Practice*.

There are Three Sorts of Persons, who seem more particularly concerned in this Application: I mean, “The yet *unexperienced*

^a Jonah I. 2, &c.

^b Prov. XXX. 8.

“*Adventurers* for Promotion ;” “ The seemingly prosperous and *envied Possessors* of it ;” And, “ They, *whose Views* have hitherto proved *unsuccessful*.”

1. The *First* of these will not, I hope, after what has been offered, misapprehend me as discouraging *all Attempts* to advance their *Credit* or their *Stations* in Life. No : There is an allowable, a commendable, a necessary, Ambition. Those Distinctions in particular, which are in Places of Education proposed as *Encouragements to Industry*, (and may they ever continue to be impartially conferred as the *Rewards of real Merit* !) will always justify such a *Desire to obtain*, as is accompanied by a proportionable *Study to deserve*, them. But the greatest Danger will be, when Those Retirements are exchanged for a more publick Scene, for a *wide World*, full of Temptations and Snares of various Kinds ; and where *He*, in particular, *that maketh haste to be Great*, cannot so easily be innocent.

Here then, the Advice of St. *James*, for the Conduct of Life upon *trying Occasions*, will be especially seasonable ; “ *If any Man lack Wisdom, let him ask of God* ;” let him apply for Guidance and Support to That best of Beings, who is able to *hold up his Goings*

and to *lead him in the right Way*. It may be prudent also, before he proceeds, to ^a*sit down first and consult, whether He be able to encounter the Difficulties lying in the Way to an exalted Station, and (in Case of Success) to answer the Demands of it.* Should he find himself *not yet* disheartened, let him next consider seriously, *upon what Motives, and with what Purpose, he is about to engage in the arduous Enterprize.* Above all, let him conscientiously ask his own Heart, *by what Methods he proposes to secure his Advancement: Always bearing in Mind That most concerning Interrogatory of our Judge Himself,* “^b *What is a Man profited, if he shall gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul!*” Or, “*What shall a Man give in Exchange for his Soul!*”

There is a Suggestion, by which the ambitious Man seems frequently to impose upon himself. — To such an one *Self-Love* is perpetually whispering, “that *his Accomplishments* are too considerable to be *thrown away* upon his present *confined Station*: *Could he but raise himself to such or such a Post, he might then display them greatly to the Advantage of the Publick*: And, for *so laudable a Purpose, a small Deviation from the strict Rules*

^a Luk. XIV. 31.

^b Matt. XVI. 26.

“ of Casuistry, may ('tis to be presumed) *for*
 “ *once* be dispensed with : Especially since, if
 “ *he* should *now* be kept back by his *unseason-*
 “ *able Scruples*, the Employment will proba-
 “ bly devolve upon *some Body* or other in all
 “ respects much *less fitted* for it.” — I say not
 that this Sort of Reasoning with themselves is
 always *drawn out in form* : Only where Men,
 otherwise of fair Character, take such Mea-
 sures for their own Advancement as are some-
 times too visible, it may, even charitably, be
 supposed, that some *Self-Deceit* of this Kind
 lies at the *Bottom*. But surely such Men, *be*
 their *Abilities* as extraordinary as themselves
 imagine them to be, would do well to *leave*
 the *Government* of the World in the Hands
 of *That* God, who at *first made*, and *still up-*
holds it ; and who needs not *their Wisdom*,
(which is at best Foolishness with Him) to as-
 sist Him in carrying on the Affairs of it. —
 To sit still, in a State of Indolence and Sloth,
 when there is a *proper Occasion* for the Exer-
 tion of Your Endowments, would certainly be
 blameable. But, if honourable Methods *can-*
not, dishonourable ones *must not*, make Way
 for Your Advancement to the most useful Sta-
 tion. For, *who hath required This at Your*
Hands ? How can You hope for a *Blessing* on

the Exercife of Power thus *invaded*? But however, the moft *beneficial* Purpofes muft not be ferved by *unwarrantable* Means. Whatever fome later Cafuifts may have found it convenient to determine, We have the Authority of an *infpired* *Apoftle* for pronouncing *their Damnation juft*, who *say*, or who *slandero*usly accufe others of faying, “^a *Let us do Evil that Good may come* ;” pretending to promote even *God’s Glory* by *breaking His Commands*.

2. Might I presume to addrefs myfelf, in the *next* Place, to the *Mighty and Honourable*, or were the prefent a fit Occafion for fo doing ; the Application fhould be in the Words of *St. Paul*, ^b *Be not high-minded but fear*. Pride and Security are indeed Vices that too naturally accompany exalted Stations ; but furely more unfuitable Attendants thereupon cannot well be conceived. For, can any Thing be more irrational, than to ^c *to glory in what one has received* ! to be *proud* of being in *Debt* ! to *grow vain* upon having a *large Account* to make up ! or can any Thing be more fottifh, than to be fearless and fecure, whilft (in the Words of the Son of *Sirach*, moft applicable to a Man of elevated Rank) ^d *he goeth in the Midft of Snares, and walketh upon the*

^a Rom. III. 8.

^b II id. XI. 20.

^c I Cor. IV. 7.

^d Eccluf. IX. 7.

Battlements of the City? exposed at once to the *direct* Attacks of declared *Enemies without*, and to the casual or wanton, perhaps *treacherous*, Darts from supposed *Friends within*.

Let me not, however, be understood to recommend to the Great and Powerful a dastardly *Despondency* of Mind, or an unmanly *Desertion* of the *Post of Honour* assigned them by the Governour of the Universe. Rather let them reflect (and an encouraging Reflection it may well be) that if their *Obligations* are *strict*, and their *Dangers* great, so will the *Reward* of a *faithful* Discharge be great also. He that usefully employed and conscientiously improved his ^a *Ten Talents*, had his Fidelity *proportionably* applauded, and *Authority* given him over *Ten Cities*.

Weighty indeed is the *Trust*, but *valuable* also are the *Privileges*, and *glorious* the *Opportunities*, which *Wealth* and *Power*, *regularly* *acquired*, bring along with them! To be ^b *Eyes to the Blind*, *Feet to the Lame*, and *Fathers to the Poor*! And, not only to supply the *present* Wants, and to relieve the *Distresses*, of all around them, but to make *standing* *Provisions* for the *Accommodation* and *Instruction* of *distant* *Ages*!—*These* are *Employ-*

^a Luk. XIX. 16, 17.

^b Job XXIX. 15.

ments Noble and Godlike ! And happy Those *Favourites of Heaven*, among whom our *Venerable* FOUNDERS, and our many *illustrious* BENEFACTORS, might on *any* Occasion justly be mentioned, but could hardly on *This* Occasion (without Injustice be omitted) who have at once been *blest* with the *Bounties* of Providence, and with *Hearts*, to apply them to such salutary Purposes as *These* ! Happy Those highly respectable *Personages*, whom God is *still* pleased to employ as *willing Instruments* of His own Glory and the Benefit of Mankind, particularly in the Encouragement and Direction of Those many *charitable Institutions*, which honourably distinguish the present *Age*, and in Recommendation whereof This *our Country* appeared with an *early* and exemplary Forwardness : Far from grudging at, every good Man will praise God for, the Pre-eminences and Possessions of Those, who make *such Use* of them : Who, being perpetually mindful *from whom* they receive their Power, and *to whom* they stand accountable for the Exercise of it, are as *Good* as they are *Great*, as *beneficial* as they are *extensive* in their Influence : Who, *so use* their Opportunities as not *abusing* them ; *so pass through* some of Life's most dangerous Scenes, as to ^a *keep themselves unspotted from the World*.

Stations of Eminence, however, *can be* the Lot of, *comparatively*, but *few*. In the Pursuit of *Great Things*, the most upright Intentions, supported by suitable Qualifications, and exerted in the most honourable Manner, can by no means always *ensure* the Success. Room there ever will be for *Disappointments* of the fairest Pretensions: And *These*, in the present State of human Passions, may want (what yet remains) that *some Application* should be made to *Them*.

3. And what Application can be *better suited* to the Case of the *Disappointed*, than the Wise King Solomon's Advice, "^a *Let not thine Heart envy Sinners, but be Thou in the Fear of the LORD all the Day long.*" Be Thy Allotment what it will, learn not only with Contentedness to acquiesce in, but with Cheerfulness to accommodate thyself to it: ^b *Rendering to All their Dues*; to thy Superiours in particular that Measure of Respect and Honour, which the Order of Society and the Law of GOD and Man require: Instead of *envying their Greatness*, *reflect* on their *Dangers*; and let *That* Reflection engage Thee to *rejoice* when They *do well*, to put a *candid Construction* on their *doubtful Conduct*, and to make *equitable Allowances* for the *less defensi-*

^a Prov. XXIII. 17.

^b Rom. XIII. 7.

ble Instances of it. *Murmurings and Complains* upon every Disappointment are indeed as inconsistent with *the Fear of the LORD* as They are with Duty to Man: They may perhaps discharge themselves *immediately* against the Badness of the Times, the Partiality of the Great, the General Neglect of Merit, &c. But *in the Result* They will be found to *charge foolishly* that All-wise Being, * *in whose Hand are the Hearts of Men as the Rivers of Water, and He turneth them whithersoever He will.*

Nor is the *Imprudence* of a discontented Temper less visible than its *Impiety*. I mean, not only that Fretfulness and Envy are Enemies to our Repose and aggravate Disappointments into (what They *need not* otherwise be) *real Evils*; nor that They often defeat their own End, by preventing that Advancement which a more *patient Continuance in Well-doing* might probably have secured; but chiefly, that they always betray an *entirely-wrong Estimate* of Human Happiness. For, what is All This, for the Want of which the Man is so *dissatisfied* with himself, and for the Acquisition whereof he so *envies* his Neighbour? Why, a lofty Station, a pompous Title, a numerous Retinue, or the like. But is *real Sa-*

* Prov. XXI. 1.

tisfaction, is serene Enjoyment, a *never-failing Attendant* on Any, or on All, of these? Ask the Persons possessed of These *Great Things*: And, if They deal ingenuously, They will upon their own Experience assure You, the Reverse is generally true. So far is Enjoyment from being *confined* to such a Situation, that perhaps it may be found *more rarely* in *That*, than almost in any other: There being a smaller Share of that *Freedom*, which consists chiefly in a Man's *Command of himself*, and of his own precious Moments; and which must ever make a *principal Ingredient* in human Happiness.

In short: *To be ready* to serve the Publick in *some* useful Employment, is every *Able Man's* Duty; but *to choose*, in *what Rank* he shall serve it, is not so. When therefore You find Cause to think that *the LORD keeps You back from Honour*, notwithstanding Your upright Endeavours to deserve it; You have done *Your Part*, and may leave the rest to *Him*: In full Assurance (as the *Wise Man* goes on in the Passage just cited) that *there shall be a Reward*, and that, whatever becomes of outward Splendour, *Your Expectations*, in regard to inward Comfort, *shall not fail*. Though You may want swelling Titles, and large Re-

venues, yet ^a *in Your Patience possess Ye Your SOULS.*

Permit me to *leave* upon Your Minds one short Reflection, arising from the Whole.

Seek we Great Things, then, for ourselves? If we look no farther than the *present*, the Answer suggested by constant Experience must be, *Seek them not.* The Pursuit is vexatious, the Possession unsatisfying, the Tenure precarious, the Loss insupportable: And yet, the same Experience tells us, that *something Great* we *must seek* so long as any *Generosity* remains within us, and cannot help it. — *How* is This to be accounted for? Is Man the *only* Being, whose *best* Appetites have *no proper Object*, whose highest *Ambition* is *never* to be *gratified*? Hath *This World* nothing in it *Great* enough to satisfy his Desires, or even to *deserve* his *Seeking*? And must it, notwithstanding, *terminate* his Prospects, and be the *Period* of his Existence? — *Nature* cries out, with some Degree of Confidence, “*Surely this cannot be:*” And the Great *Author of Nature* has confirmed its Presumptions by a *Voice from Heaven*; calling off our ^b *Affections from Things on the Earth*, but encouraging us to *set them on Things Above*. ^c *God hath provided some better Things for Those, of whom this*

^a Luk. XXI. 19. ^b Col. III. 2. ^c Heb. XXVIII. 38, 40.

World hath nothing worthy: Nay, since He alone who made, can also compleatly fill, the Capacities of our Souls; He is graciously pleased to propose to us Himself for our exceeding Great Reward, our Portion for Ever! — Here then, our Desires may have their full Scope: Our Ambition here can never exceed the Dignity of its Object; and therefore here need know no Bounds. The Greatest Things in This World cannot justify our Earnestness, because ^a the Fashion of This World itself passeth away. But we may both ^b seek and strive for that Glory and Honour, which is connected with IMMORTALITY.

a 1 Cor. VII. 31.

b Rom. II. 7.

S E R M O N · XI.

TITUS III. 2.

To speak Evil of No Man.

THERE is scarce any Thing more surprising in the late *vehement Opposition* given to our Holy Religion, than that *its Opposers* should pretend all the while to be *Friends to Society* and Lovers of Mankind: Whereas, setting aside the Consideration of that inestimable Reward in a *Future State*, with which nothing proposed by any other Religion *is worthy to be compared*; it is notorious, that this great Object of their Hatred has made a far more effectual Provision for securing Men's most valuable Properties in *This Life*, and by that means for promoting Peace and *Good-Will amongst Men*, than any other Religion that ever was offered to the World.

Of *This* we have an eminent Instance in the Case suggested by the Words before us. —

St. Paul

St. *Paul* is in This and the foregoing Verse instructing *Titus* in the Choice of Subjects for His publick Exhortations ; and pointing out to Him such Instances of Duty, as it would be proper more especially to insist on. A Circumstance, which must needs recommend the Instances here specified to our particular Regard and Attention. Nor will it be improper just to observe the Order in which an inspired Apostle has here placed them.

“ *Put them in Mind to be subject to Principalities and Powers, to obey Magistrates: To be ready to every Good Work: To speak Evil of No Man.* ”

The Necessity of Government, under some Form or other, to the very Being of Society, is (I suppose) disputed by none. We have Reason to think, the most perfect Societies have something of This Kind: Heaven, we know, has *its Thrones and Dominions, its Principalities and Powers, its Angels and Archangels.* But a Subordination of Governours, which contributes so much to the Harmony and Order of the *Angels which kept their first Estate*, is yet more indispensably necessary to all Associations of such *degenerate* Creatures as Men. Justly therefore was *Titus* instructed, in the *first* Place, to put His Hearers in

Mind, to be subject to Principalities and Powers, and to obey Magistrates.

And as the Degeneracy of Mankind renders Government thus necessary to the *Being* of Society; so does the Indigence and Insufficiency of each Member *apart* render a reciprocal Communion of Good Offices requisite to the *Well-being* of the same. Government might perhaps for a Time maintain the Peace of a Society, might restrain its Members from mutual Invasions, by working upon their *Fears*. But a Circulation of *Kindnesses* can alone give Health and Vigour to the Political Body; because This alone can unite its several Parts in such a Manner and by such Hands as are best suited to their Natures. He was accordingly, in the *next Place*, to *put them in Mind, to be ready to every Good Work.*

One Thing, however, was still *lacking* to compleat the good Design; to make the Publick Welfare move regularly and without Disturbance, and Society itself continue to be a Blessing. The Peace of the Community could be but imperfectly secured, notwithstanding that the Hands of its Members were withholden from Rebellion, nay employed in the Performance of mutual good Offices, so long as their *Tongues* were left at Liberty. These would, of themselves, be soon found sufficient
to

to *set on Fire the Course of Nature*, unless put under proper Regulations. In vain would either the Authority of the Magistrate, or the Interests of the Subjects, be guarded and promoted by positive Precepts, if the Reputations of each were not also distinctly provided for. Should *These* be once invaded, other Obligations would soon be broken through. *Titus* was therefore directed (in the Words of my Text) *to put them in Mind, to speak Evil of No Man.*

You see what Rank the Point before us holds in order of *St. Paul's* Instructions: It comes next to no less Duties than *Subjection to Governours*, and *mutual Beneficence*: Duties confessedly of the highest Importance, the most absolute Necessity, to the Happiness of Society. And yet, I presume, what has been just hinted may be sufficient to shew, how well This Caution deserves the Place here assigned it.

I shall not therefore detain You with any *Apology* for the Choice of a Subject *recommended* by so high an *Authority*; and which also, there is great Reason to apprehend, will never be *unseasonable*; but endeavour, without farther Preface,

- I. To lay down some Observations proper to *explain* the *Nature*, and *adjust* the *Extent*, of the Injunction, *To speak Evil of No Man*.
- II. To *vindicate* the Injunction, so explained and limited, from such *Exceptions* as may most plausibly be urged against it. And then,
- III. To suggest some farther *Considerations*, *dissuading* from the Practice here condemned.

I. The Word here rendered *to speak Evil of* is well-known, according to its Original Import, to denote the *Hurting* any one's *Fame*, *Credit*, or *Reputation*. Now, by a Man's *Reputation*, we generally mean That Quantity of Esteem which is *expressed* for Him by others: That Value which is put upon Him in the Language of Mankind; and (as I may say) that which He passes for in common Conversation. To *speak Evil* of a Man then, according to this Account, must be, to represent His Character or Conduct in such a Manner as tends to detract from That Esteem which He is already in Possession of, and to make Him pass for less in the Opinion and Language of others than He did before.

But,

But, are We then, in this Sense, to speak Evil of *No Man*? Is it unlawful to represent *any Man whatsoever* in such a Manner as may detract from His Reputation? Thus much the Words before us may seem to imply; and they certainly can imply Nothing less, than that we should be *extremely cautious* in This particular. A Man's Reputation is a Property of great Consequence to Himself, and ought not therefore to be *wantonly* attacked or invaded by others. And yet, after all, even *This* cannot be thought a Property *absolutely unalienable*; but must, like all others, be liable to such *Forfeitures* as the Nature and Ends of Society require.

The Prohibition we are considering then, however *universal* in the *Expression*, must in the *Application* of it admit of some *Exceptions*. And, because That Charity, which Christianity requires, may be carried too far in This Case, (as it has been in some others) and, when it is so, will draw after it Consequences by no Means to be admitted; it may not be improper to be a little more particular upon This Point.

1. And *first*, it may be of Use to observe, that the Text meddles not with the Disposal of our *Commendations*. How absolutely *soever*, therefore, it may seem to restrain us
from

from *speaking Evil* of *any* Man, it by no means enjoins us to *speaking well of all* Men, much less of all Men *in the same Manner* or Degree. It is indeed of great Importance to Religion and Virtue, that *Praise* should be *appropriated* to *Those that do well*. For, why was such an eager Desire of obtaining, such a tender Concern for preserving, a Good-name, as the present Subject all along supposes, made a Part of our Nature? No doubt, for a Guard to our Innocence, and an Incitement to worthy Undertakings. And how useless must This excellent Provision become, should Innocence and Worth have no surer Title to Applause, than the Want of These Qualities? Commendation, it is plain, must cease to be desirable, wheresoever it is *promiscuously* bestowed: Nor can we, for our Encouragement in Virtue, be exhorted, “*Whatsoever Things are of Good Report,*” and, “*if there be any Praise,* to “*think on These Things;*” if Praise and Good Report be equally attainable by a quite contrary Practice.

Thus far then we may, we must, go, without any Violation of the Injunction in the Text. The Voices and Applauses of Mankind should be considered as one common Fund for the Encouragement and Reward of

great and good Undertakings ; out of which every Person should have *His Portion in due Season*, but which should by no means be squandered away or misemployed. — Such a Discrimination as This would, if well observed, be a very considerable Discouragement to Immorality, though only a *Negative One* : Were Bad Men never to meet with undeserved Commendations, They would (I am persuaded) scarce think themselves on equal Terms with Good Men, though They should escape without Reproaches.

2. *Again* : When we are enjoined to speak Evil of no *Man*, I need hardly observe, that *Vice* and *Sin* are not, *as such*, exempted from our Censures. Charity itself requires us to speak freely and severely against *These* on all proper Occasions. We must on no Account give specious Names to odious Practices ; we must not *call Evil Good*, or *put sweet for Bitter* ; so far from This, that we must give each their proper Names, whensoever we have a just Occasion to mention them. The Bulk of Mankind will ever be unequal to abstract Enquiries : They must take their Notions of Things from the Language of the World, and judge of the Natures of Actions from the Names that are affixed to them in common Conversation. 'Tis therefore of great Concernment

cernment to the Cause of Virtue, that Good and Evil should in Common Discourse meet with a Treatment as different as their Natures; and that any particular Vice, when we have Occasion to speak of it, should not only not have a *Good* Name given it, but be made to take along with it some proper Mark of our *Disapprobation*.

I would not here be misunderstood. To represent the Deformity of any Sin *in itself*, and to speak with the same Severity, upon the same Sin, as publickly charged upon a particular Person specified, may be very different Things. We must not, in either Case, miscall the Vice; but yet, in the latter, we may frequently have Cause to be *silent*, and always to be cautions in expressing ourselves, concerning it. And the Reason is This: Whatever we say of the Action will, in this latter Case, almost unavoidably, be applied to the *supposed* Agent. Now, though our Invectives against Sin may be innocent and proper, so long as they *terminate* There; yet They stand condemned by the Text, *generally* speaking, when they extend to the *Reputations* of Men. *Generally* (I say) not *always*; Because

3. *Farther: Open Examples* of Wickedness cannot be thought exempted from Reprehension and Disgrace by This or any other Prohibition.

hibition. It is indeed necessary that such Persons should meet with Infamy as publick as their Offence. Were Men of This Character to lose no Credit in the World, Human Nature gives us Reason to apprehend very undesirable Consequences. Not only They themselves would *commit Iniquity with more Greediness*, less Thought of being reformed, but their Examples would become, first less detestable, then by Degrees very tolerable, at length probably quite engaging, to such Observers as a great Part of our Species may always justly be supposed to be. Fear of Disgrace is indeed a very necessary Counterbalance to Men's Fondness for Imitation; and will have an Influence very favourable to Religion and Virtue, so long as open Offenders are *put to open Shame*. And the Christian Religion may well be supposed to disclaim all such Charity, as would dispose us to be tender of the *Reputations* of a few wicked Men, by being cruel to the *Souls* of Multitudes.

Publick Infamy then is a Penalty very proper to be annexed to publick Impiety: And what some must suffer, others must inflict. In This respect however, great Distinction should always be made between *Men in Authority*, and *Men in private Capacities*. The former may be obliged to express their Sentiments,

ments, when the latter may have neither Obligation nor Right to do so. They are Men in publick Stations, who are chiefly concerned to see ^a *the Scorners smitten that the simple may beware*; and that ^b *such as Sin openly be rebuked before all Men, that others also may fear*. They may more gracefully cause their Wrath to wax hot against the Ungodly than other Men: They may with Success set their Faces against the Workers of Iniquity: They lastly, if any Persons can, must scatter away all Evil with their Eyes. But yet it cannot be denied, that Magistrates will find it impossible to attain all These good Ends without a subordinate Assistance; and, particularly in the Case before us, in Vain will They condemn, if private Persons do not execute the Sentence.

After all; an honest Mind will carefully distinguish between the Suggestions of Spleen which are never to be gratified, and the real Demands of Duty which are always to be answered. He will consider farther that Men's Sins are the only proper Objects of a just Indignation; and will therefore abstract as much as possible from the Person of the Offender, where He finds it necessary to express His Detestation of the Offence. The Caution recommended by St. Paul in a similar Case is

^a Prov. XIX. 25.

^b 1 Tim. V. 20.

very applicable to This before us : ^a *We must not count the Offending Person as an Enemy, but speak of Him as of a Brother.* The Consideration that a Man stands in *This* Relation to us, cannot fail of engaging us, in ordinary Cases, to treat His *Person* with *Tenderness*, with whatever *Severity* we may speak of His *Actions*. By This Method we shall, after *Our* Proportion, *be merciful, as our Father in Heaven is merciful* ; who provided a Ransom for a whole World of Sinners : And such a Ransom, as at once demonstrated His tender Mercy towards His *Creatures*, and His irreconcilable Hatred of Their *Sins*. — And yet,

4. Once more : It may well be supposed allowable, in some *particular* Cases, even to *expose* the *Person* of an Offender, though His Offence might otherwise for some Time escape the Publick Observation. The Interests of true Religion and Virtue in General, and the Security of particular Persons, require that *Characters* of *some* Kinds should be known. And *some Sins* are of such a Nature, that Persons capable of committing them cannot without great Detriment, or at least Danger to the Publick be concealed. In such Cases, we may, by an unseasonable *Tenderness* of Men's Reputations, *be Partakers of their Sins*.

^a 2 Thess. III. 15.

This, however, is a Point, in which we may easily mistake: It concerns us therefore to proceed with Caution and to deal fairly with ourselves. *Justice* demands, that we forbear making any such Discoveries without *satisfactory Evidence* of their Truth; and *Charity*, after That, will oblige us to defer the doing of it, till we have *sufficient Cause* for such a Publication: And, when These Circumstances appear to concur, we should do well to reflect, whether we do not *use This Liberty for a Cloak of Maliciousness*? Whether we are not gratifying our own Peevishness or Resentment, under a Pretence of Concern for the Publick Safety; and, whilst we would be thought solicitous for the Cautioning of others, in fact only more plausibly avenging ourselves. Publick-Spiritedness, exerting itself in a lawful Manner, *is honourable before All Men*: But the Envious and Uncharitable, the Avengers of themselves, God *will judge*.

After what has been said, the Case of *Witnesses*, or even of voluntary *Accusers*, in *Criminal* Matters, and the Cautions to be observed therein, need hardly be specified. A good Man will not be rash or forward in giving Information or Evidence: But where Necessity appears, He considers such Informa-

tions as *Debts* to the Publick for the Payment of which He is strictly accountable. The Business of *Informing* against Breakers of the Laws has indeed ordinarily fallen into such *bad Hands* in this Nation, that the Practice itself is almost grown infamous and the very Name odious, amongst us. *This*, however, is a *fore Evil*; and both betrays and considerably adds to our Degeneracy as a People; whilst by this means many of the best Laws that human Wisdom can devise, are become in a Manner useless and obsolete. In Fact, the regular Execution of Penalties is not more necessary to secure the Observance of Laws, than the Informations of private Persons, are to such a regular Execution. It must therefore be an unjustifiable Candour, which inclines us to screen the Reputation of a corrupted Part of the Society by such Methods as would endanger the whole. The very same Benevolence, which would dispose us to excuse and conceal the Miscarriages of a *Brother*, will plead as strongly for our bringing Him to condign Punishment, when he shall have forfeited *That* Appellation by becoming a *Troubler of Israel*.

The foregoing Remarks may receive both Illustration and Authority from the Direction
of

of our LORD Himself. ^a *If (saith He) Thy Brother trespass against Thee, tell Him His Fault between Thee and Him: if He shall hear Thee, Thou hast gained Thy Brother. But, if He will not hear Thee, take with Thee one or two more, that in the Mouth of Two or Three Witnesses every Word may be established. If He shall neglect to hear Them, tell it to the Church; but, if He neglect to hear the Church, let Him be unto Thee as an Heathen Man and a Publican. Verily I say unto You, whatsoever Ye shall bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever Ye shall loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven.* The Offending Person (we see) was *first* to be *privately admonished*, that so He might be made sensible of His Fault without Prejudice to His Reputation. Should This Method prove ineffectual, He was *not presently* to be exposed to *publick* Infamy; but yet neither was His Good-Name to be thought so inviolable, but that *Two or Three Witnesses* might be made acquainted with His Offence. If after This He *persisted*, a *farther* Publication of His Trespass and His *Obstinacy*, to the *Church* was allowable and necessary. And the yet *incorrigible Criminal* (for He no longer appears in the Character of a *Brother*) was to

^a Matt. XVIII. 15, 16, 17, 18.

be delivered over to *Ecclesiastical*, and, in Them, to *Divine* Censures.

Upon the Whole : This is a Case, in which a great Deal must be left to every Man's own Prudence and Integrity ; which may perhaps, after all, be the best Casuists upon any Emergency. Only thus much I would observe in general, that if we are pleased with Hearing well of our Neighbour : If we are desirous that His Good Deeds should be honourably mentioned ; and His Failings and Miscarriages, as much as the Interests of Religion and Society will permit, veiled and concealed : If we then *only* divulge, or encourage others in divulging Them, when the Glory of God, the Cause of Religion, the Good of Society, or Justice to particular Persons, *necessarily* calls for such a Publication ; In other Cases, putting the most favourable Construction on Men's Intentions and Actions that They will fairly admit of, and making all proper Abate-ments for Infirmary, Surprize, &c. Then may we reasonably hope, *Our Heart is in This Respect, right before God.* — But if we *rejoice in Iniquity* : If we *unnecessarily expose*, or *unreasonably aggravate*, any Man's real Failings ; if with a secret Satisfaction, or out of any unwarrantable Motive, we *dwell upon* the Recital of His Sins ; (I need not add) if we maliciously

liciously ascribe to Him Sins with which he is *not justly* chargeable : The Allowances before given reach not *our* Case ; we are yet in the *Gall of Bitterness*. And we all know who hath said — “ *With what Judgment Ye judge, Ye shall be judged, and, with what Measure Ye mete, it shall be measured to You again.*”

Having thus endeavoured to adjust the *Extent* of the Injunction before us ; by shewing, *how far* we may safely proceed in the Case of Censure ; and, What That Forbearance is, which our Religion really enjoins ; it will now be less difficult,

II. To *vindicate* This Forbearance against such *Pleas*, as will most probably be urged in Favour of *greater Licence* in Defamation.

To begin with That which appears most plausible. “ *Tenderness of Men’s Reputations* “ in Cases of *real* Misbehaviour, will be represented as too favourable to the Interests “ of Vice and Immorality ; by leaving Bad “ and Good Men too much on a *Level* in the “ Estimation of Mankind ; and by restraining “ Men from That Zeal against Sin, which the “ *Work of Reformation* requires.”

a Matt. VII. 2.

All

All reasonable Concessions have, I hope, been already made (as no doubt, very considerable ones ought to be made) to This Plea. Let us see then, whether a farther Enlargement of the Liberty of Defamation would probably be attended with Those desirable Consequences, in Favour of Virtue and Reformation, which This Expedient proposes?

First then: May we not ask Those Persons, who are so very solicitous for keeping up a *due Distinction* between the Reputations of Good and Bad Men, Whether every Good Man has not *some* unguarded Moments, is not *sometimes overtaken in a Fault*; and does not therefore (were *Truth only* a sufficient Occasion) *give* several *Occasions to speak reproachfully*? Whether, supposing Justice should be done to His Good Qualities at the same Time that His Misconduct is exposed, This *latter* would not probably make a *durable Impression*, whilst the Former would pass little observed, and yet less remembered? Whether therefore They, by Their Forwardness, might not fix a lasting Stain upon a *Good Man's* Reputation; and so promote That *Levelling* of Characters, which They take such *improper* Methods to avoid?

May we not also ask Those, who persuade themselves They are actuated by a commendable

able *Zeal* in their uncharitable Censures ; What an unaccountable Instance of Zeal for Religion They give by their Industry in exposing the Miscarriages of its Professors ? They know very well, that one chief Recommendation of Vice, and *that wherein its great Strength lieth*, is the supposed Number of its Adherents, *without which it would become weak*, and appear in its *Native Deformity*. And why then do They *unnecessarily* (if not *unjustly*) add to This Number ? Why do They weaken the Hands of the Friends of Virtue, by describing to them so particularly the Interest and Powerfulness of its Enemies, and by spreading *the Evil Report*, that *They saw the Sons of Anak there* ? A Zeal, thus expressed, is evidently destructive of its own End ; and therefore as *contrary to Knowledge* as it is to Charity.

The Truth is, the Cause of Virtue, and particularly with regard to the Work of Reformation, will always suffer, instead of being promoted, by a censorious and Uncharitable Behaviour in Those who undertake the Promotion of it. — The *Young Sinner* particularly, upon finding His Character so soon aspersed, and Reputation held by so very precarious a Tenure, will be strongly tempted to abandon Himself, once for all, to Impudence
and

and Shamelessness. — Offenders of the most *ingenuous* Tempers are at the same Time but too apt to affect an Opposition to any Thing like Ill-Nature, wheresoever it appears; nor must we wonder to find them sometimes chusing to go on in a Way, which They perhaps know to be wrong, rather than to leave it for the right one upon the Recommendation of a Person, who comes, Himself, so ill recommended. — And, as to Those, who are chiefly influenced by an *ungenerous Fear* of Disgrace, *They* will easily learn to laugh at That Infamy, which is dealt about so liberally, and with so little Consideration; and become audacious and incorrigible, when That Reproach, the Fear of which could alone restrain Them from Sinning, and the Feeling of which *could* alone give Them sufficient Disturbance in it, is so extended and diffused, as to have lost all its Pressure.

Whereas, whilst our Severity in speaking of Vicious Characters appears to proceed rather from *Necessity* than *Choice*, and our Censures to give Pain rather than Diversion to the Executioners of Them: This will reconcile at least ingenuous Minds to the Cause in which we are engaged. 'Tis not to be doubted, but that after all that can be done, our Zeal will find Matter enough to exert itself
upon;

upon; and *there* we ask for no Coolness or Lukewarmness. But then it should not, for *this very Reason*, evaporate on improper Occasions, in undue Quantities. Let Disgrace be kept in Reserve as a Penalty *always* to be used when Necessity calls for it, and *then only*. This will give it Weight where it is felt, and Terror where it is only apprehended. Few Men will lie contentedly under That Infamy, which They find *appropriated* to ^a *Those that offend of malicious Wickedness*.

But it will be farther pleaded, “that Severity in our Censures of Persons *really faulty* is an Instance of *Impartiality*; an Act of *Justice* to the Merits of the *Cause before us*; “a treating Actions and Characters *as being* “*what They really are*.”

And it must indeed be allowed, that where a Cause does come *properly* before us, we ought to *judge according to Truth*. But how rarely is this the Case in Common Conversation? For may we not ask the Retailer of Scandal, whence he received his Commission to sit in Judgment over his Brethren? or, *who gave him This Authority*? This is a Question, which *Justice* obliges him to answer. St. James may instruct him, that ^b *there is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy*;

a Psal. LIX. 5. b Jam. IV. 12.

and that ^a *to speak Evil of our Brother, and to judge our Brother* (that is, without Authority or Commission from Him) is virtually *to speak Evil of the Law and to judge the Law*. Indeed common Sense would shew the Unwarrantableness of *Judging another Man's Servant*; and common Practice might inform us of the Necessity of a regular Process in the Execution of the Laws themselves.

However, waving This; what *Security* can the forward Censurer of his Brethren ordinarily have, that his Severity does *not exceed* the Bounds of that Justice which he undertakes to execute? We are certainly, in many Cases, very incompetent Judges, either of the general Characters, or of the particular Actions of others. Men really virtuous are not always so solicitous about *Appearances*, as indeed They ought to be: Content with approving Themselves to the great Searcher of Hearts, They often perform *innocent* Actions in a Manner capable of being represented to their Disadvantage. So that where we *judge according to the Appearance*, we may be very far from *judging righteous Judgment*. — Besides, how frequently do Passion or Prejudice bribe our Judgments into a wrong Opinion of others! how seldom are We disinterested enough in

^a Jam. IV. 11.

relation to their Characters to be safely trusted with the Representation of them! — And, after all, supposing we had Discernment enough to see the Truth, and Impartiality enough to pass Sentence accordingly; yet it concerns us to remember, that *the Tongue is an unruly Evil*; upon every Concession rising in its Demands of still farther Enlargement; and almost insensibly hurrying us on from defamatory Truths to false Accusations. — These are Considerations, which certainly deserve some Regard; and, when put together, may give the Circulator of Scandal just Reason to apprehend, He is frequently transgressing That Justice to Men's Merits, for which He professes to have so great Concern.

Perhaps We shall be asked, (as *the meekest Man upon the Earth once was*) — “^a *Would We put out the Eyes of Men?*” We shall be told, “that *Ignorance* is the Parent of Admiration “and Applauses: That the Discovery of Flaws “and Imperfections is the fittest Exercise of a “quick Apprehension, a good Discernment: “And that, accordingly, Men possessed of “These Qualifications are usually the severest “Judges of the Actions or Characters of others.”

^a Numb. XVI. 14.

Now,

Now, if by Acuteness in discovering Imperfections any Quality is meant, in which Men are not in great Measure *passive*: If what is pleaded for, under This Disguise, be a Liberty of *industriously prying* into the Conduct of others, with whom we have no Concern; a Readiness at making *groundless* Surmises; or, where there may be Room for Suspicion, at putting the *worst* Construction upon every Thing which it will easily admit of; we are not disposed to question the Censorious Person's Title to *such* a Quickness of Apprehension. He must, however, give us Leave to observe that This His Sagacity (whatever specious Names He may please to give it) discovers a Temper of Mind not very agreeable to That *Charity* which **thinketh*, or imputeth *no Evil*, not very proper to be found among such Creatures as Men. If Discernment be a Qualification so hard to be pleaded, may we all evermore want such Discernment!

However, the Man of Discernment may be allowed to *see* the Failings of others. We contend not for Men's putting out their Eyes, nor for their always shutting Them; but only for their Holding their Tongues, when there is no just Occasion for speaking. *A Com-*

mandment, surely, not grievous! No Body imagines, that Charity or Christian Forbearance consists in not blaming, or not exposing, Those Faults Men know nothing of. But then, to refrain from speaking all the Evil we know: To let a prejudicial Truth die with us: To be tender of a Brother's Reputation, where we have it in our Power to wound or destroy it; nay even though we could be never so witty or entertaining upon the Subject.—This is a Piece of Self-Denial, which may not perhaps display any extraordinary Quickness of Apprehension, or Acuteness of Discernment; but which however We can recommend to the Detractor as a proper Evidence of true Greatness and Generosity of Mind: An Accomplishment at least as valuable as the Former, and not less worthy to adorn the Character of a *Christian*.—But I hasten (as I proposed in the *last Place*,)

III. To suggest to You some proper *Considerations, dissuading* from the Practice of defaming and aspersing the Characters of others beyond the Limits already pointed out, and particularly from that Licence which is too frequently assumed in Common Conversation.

I. And

1. And first, let us briefly reflect upon the *Cruelty* of entertaining ourselves and others at the Expence of our Neighbour's Reputation.

If any Man wants to be convinced of This, let Him consult His own Breast on the Occasion : Let Him recollect what Sentiments arose *there*, if at any Time *His* Reputation was wounded or only struck at : Let Him (as in Justice He ought) consider the Answer He receives as made with equal Right by every other Person in the same Circumstances : And then let Him tell us, whether *Any Sorrow is like his Sorrow*, who is robbed of His Good-Name. Reputation is what every Man, at least every wise and good Man, looks upon as His most valuable Possession ; and which, when joined with a good Conscience, makes one of the noblest Supports under the Want of all other Treasures. Whilst therefore such ample Materials are always at Hand, for the Purposes of an entertaining and rational Conversation ; for Scholars and Christians to divert each other at the Expence of This, and (as it were) to *serve it up* for the welcome Reception of every Visitant, or for the Entertainment of every Reader ; is an Instance of Inhumanity too nearly resembling that of the *Rich Man* in *Nathan's Parable* ; ^a *Who, sparing*

a 2 Sam. XII. 13, 14.

to take of His own numerous Flock, sent to fetch the Poor Man's favourite Ewe-Lamb, which He had long nourished up in His own Bosom, and which He had unto Him as a Daughter; and dressed it for the Wayfaring Man that was come unto Him!

2. But if Regards of Compassion should be insufficient, let us consider the *Imprudence* of This Practice, which we shall find at least equal to the Cruelty of it.

^a *If any Man will love Life (saith the Psalmist) and would fain see Good Days; let Him refrain His Tongue from Evil, and His Lips that They speak no Guile.* A Property so highly valued by its Owner as a Good-Name generally is, we may be sure, will be guarded with a proportionable Tenderneſs. A contemptuous, much more a reproachful Word, not only with regard to the Acuteness of the Pain, but the Keenneſs of the Reſentment it occasions, is often literally *ſharper than a Two-edged Sword*. And, though the Talebearer's Impertinence may perhaps for a while *divert* Thoſe, whoſe Characters are not immediately affected by it; yet it generally brings upon Him not only the Hatred of Thoſe whom He injures, but the Diſeſteem and Ill-will of all.

^b *A Man of an ill Tongue is dangerous in His*

^a Pſal. XXXIV. 12, 13.

^b Eccluſ. IX. 18.

City, and He that is rash in His Talk shall be hated. He is indeed in a State of Hostility with His Neighbours, and is usually looked upon as a common Enemy. *His Tongue, as Opportunity offers itself, is against every Man;* and He must not be surpris'd, if *every Man's Tongue should be against Him.* And should such an *Accuser of his Brethren* have so far got over all Concern for his own Reputation, as to be *past Feeling* on such Occasions, for *himself* as well as *others*; yet surely *we* ought to consider, and *sober Men will* consider, What *Title* He deserves, Who can *cast about him Firebrands, Arrows, and Death,* and all the while that he is thus defaming *his Neighbour* can coolly say, "*Am I not in Sport?*"

3. Considerations of This Kind however, though by no means unworthy of our Attention, are of small Moment when compared with the *Danger* of This Practice, as set forth to us in That Gospel, by which we are to be judged.

Christianity, as it has extended our Prospects infinitely farther than Mere Morality could ever have done; so has it been particularly solicitous to warn us of the fatal Consequences of *Evil-speaking* in Relation to our most valuable Interests. The ^b *Government of*

^a Prov. XXVI. 18, 19.

^b Jam. I. 26.

the Tongue is there represented as of so great Importance, that *without it all* our Pretences to Religion are vain. We are told, that ^a *by our Words we shall be justified, or condemned at the last Day*; and particularly, that *for every idle* (that is, according to the Interpretation which the Occasion seems to require) every *defamatory Word*, ^b *that Man shall speak, He shall give Account thereof in the Day of Judgment*. And accordingly (as has been ^c often observed) there is scarce a Catalogue of Sins, of which a more severe Account than ordinary will be required at That great Day, in which *Evil-speaking* is not particularly mentioned.

4. And yet, Christianity, however seemingly severe, is by no Means arbitrary, in its Threats against Evil-speaking. It sets before us *Reasons* as well as *Denunciations*; and, whilst it makes us sensible of the *Dangerous Consequences* of This Practice, does not leave us without peculiar Proofs of the *Heinous Nature* of it.

Thus, when we read, that ^d *Man was created in the Image of God*: What can we infer from hence, but that to revile or *speak Evil* of any Man must involve in it some Degree of

^a Matt. XII. 37. ^b Ibid. 36. ^c A-Bp. Tillotson in loc.
^d Gen. I. 27.

Contempt of That Being whose Image He bears. St. *James*, has pointed out to us This Use of the Consideration before us, in speaking of the Vices of the *Tongue*. ^a *Therewith* (saith He) *bless we God, and therewith curse we Man, who was made after the Similitude of God*. A Practice, at first Sight, inconsistent and irrational; and to which therefore He subjoins This short and plain, but very expressive Condemnation, ^b *These Things my Brethren ought not so to be*.

But we need not rest here. If the Force of This Argument has suffered great Abatements by Man's *Degeneracy*; yet we shall find *These* more than compensated, upon taking into our Account the extraordinary Methods made Use of for His *Recovery*. *The Son of God* has greatly ennobled and dignified our Nature by taking it upon Himself; and, by *calling us Brethren*, has stamped a new Sacredness upon our Character: Above all, by purchasing Redemption from Death, and a Title to an Eternal Inheritance, for us, and This at no less Expence than That of *His own Blood*, He has still more emphatically *put us in Mind, to speak Evil of no Man*. If the Heathen Philosopher might argue, and

^a Jam. III. 9. ^b Ibid. 10.

their Orator declame, upon the Dignity of Human Nature, and the Unlawfulness of treating any Partaker of it with Contempt or Reproach, from the erect Posture of His Body, and the Elevation of His Countenance, &c. — With how far superiour Force may the *Christian* urge That one short Consideration in Favour of the seemingly most inconsiderable of His Brethren, — *Despise not Thou Him, for whom CHRIST died!*

Again : With Regard to Men's Infirmities and lower Qualifications, which take up so great a Share of the Detractor's Conversation ; when Revelation informs us, that every good Christian is the ^a *Temple of the Holy Ghost* ; and that Men's various Endowments are ^b *the Gifts of That one and the self-same Spirit, who divideth to every Man severally as He will* : The lowest Abilities in This View appear by no Means proper Objects of Censure or Reproach. *He that on This Account despiseth, despiseth not Man but GOD*, who also hath given unto us His Holy Spirit. And to every such vain Boaster we may with great Propriety address the Apostle's Expostulation, "^c *Who maketh Thee to differ from another, and what hast Thou, that Thou didst not receive?* Now

a 1 Cor. III. 16.

b Ibid. XII. 11.

c Ibid. IV. 7.

*“if Thou didst receive it, why dost Thou glory,
“as if Thou hadst not received it?”*

Lastly : With regard to Men's real Faults and Miscarriages ; when our LORD declares, that our Treatment of our Brethren here shall be the Measure of His Proceedings with us at the last Day ; how *unreasonable* (I do not now say, how *dangerous*) must uncharitable Censures appear ! This is a Denunciation, which brings its *Reasons* along with it, and meets with something in every Breast bearing Testimony to the Equitableness of it. *Righteous*, and even Gracious, art Thou O LORD, in *All that Thou hast here said unto us !* We already *feel* the Goodness of such a Determination. We shall stand *condemned out of our own Mouths* ; and be obliged to proclaim the Equity even of a *“Judgment without Mercy,* if We ourselves shall be found to *have shewed no Mercy !*

To conclude then : If We must needs be Censuring, let us turn Our Censures upon *Ourselves*. Our Zeal, our *Impartiality*, our *Quickness of Apprehension*, will here be well employed : *Severity*, (I had almost said, *Uncharitableness*) will be commendable, when our own Misconduct is the Object of it. If, up-

on an impartial Review of His own past Life, any of us shall find Himself, ^a *without Sin*; *let Him cast the first Stone*, let Him be the foremost in attacking the Reputation of His Neighbour. But, I am persuaded, our Tendernefs for other Men will rise in Proportion to our Acquaintance with ourselves. We shall have little Leisure to ^b *judge our Brother*, and still less Inclination to *set at Nought our Brother*, if we make a proper Use of This one Consideration,—“*We must All stand before the* *“ Judgment-Seat of CHRIST !”*

^a Joh. VIII. 7.

^b Rom. XIV. 10.

S E R M O N XII.

COLOSSIANS III. 2.

*Set Your Affection on Things above, not
on Things on the Earth.*

AMONG many important Designs, which the Revelation of the *Gospel* is calculated to promote, the first Propagators of It seem to have had None more constantly in view, than *That* recommended by the Words here before us. *A Design*, every-way *worthy* of so gracious an Institution; and (as I may venture to add) *peculiar* to It. The *Affections* are confessedly the main Springs of human Action: The Regulation of *These*, therefore, must be of principal Concern in Morality: And accordingly *This* is what the Writers on *That* Subject have all along professed to aim at, and pretended to have accomplished. But never was this excellent End so rationally aimed at, or so successfully accomplished, as under the *Gospel*-
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pel-Dispensation: Which, by opening a new Scene of Things, hath discovered a new Set of Objects to the Affections of Mankind; and hath given them a Direction as far superiour to any that was ever prescribed by mere Philosophy, *as the Heavens are higher than the Earth.*

“That *the Things on the Earth*, the Possessions and the Pleasures of this present “World, are Objects utterly incapable of *satisfying* the Soul of *Man*,” hath always been a Truth obvious enough. *Thus far*, therefore, many of the Philosophers easily might, and did, go in Their Discoveries. But then, after They had *withdrawn*, I should rather say, *attempted* to withdraw, the Affections of their Disciples from *Things on the Earth*, They were at a Loss for any Thing *substantial*, whereon to fix them. — One well-known Sect among them, having *sought* some proper *Rest* for the Affections *and found none*, declared for an *Extirpation* of the Affections themselves. *This* however soon discovered itself to be a wild and impracticable Scheme; the *real Sensations* of the *Man* constantly refuting the *extravagant Pretensions* of the *Philosopher*. — *Others* dwelt, with much seeming Rapture, upon the *Idea of Wisdom* and the Native Charms of Virtue; as sufficient to engage the Affections

Affections of all who should bring Minds *fitly disposed* to this sublime Contemplation. But then, where to find *any Number* of Minds *thus disposed*, was the Difficulty; and, among such Creatures as *Men*, was soon perceived to be an *insuperable* one. — And though others *talked*, and (to do them Justice) sometimes acted, *Great Things*, upon a Prospect of *perpetuating their Names*, and (as They called it) *living for ever*, in the Memories of succeeding Ages; yet *their Fondness* also seemed somewhat unaccountably placed upon a Reward, the Payment whereof was not to take Place till They must in Person be incapable of receiving it. — Those therefore, who were for a more popular and more practicable Scheme of Morality, made *Good* or *Happiness* (some of the best of them joining *Social Good* with *Private*) the Object of the Affections. But all the while, They were got *no farther*, at least with any *Certainty*, than this *present World*. “*The Things above*,” was a Phrase, with which the Heathen Morality was little acquainted: And to *set the Affection upon them* might have been called, at the first Promulgation of the Gospel, a *New Commandment*.

A Commandment however it is of That *Importance*, that upon the *Observance* or *Neglect* of it Men's *Moral Characters* will always be

be found *principally* to depend. An *Affection* for This World, an *inordinate* Desire and Pursuit of its *Good* Things, or an *excessive* Fear of, and Aversion to, its *Evils*, is a Principle into which all the Follies, the Vices, and the Villanies Men are guilty of, may be resolved: As on the other Hand, a *serious* Attention and Regard to the *Things above* can alone support a Man in the uniform Practice of Virtue and Godliness. — When we behold a rational Being hurried on from the Commission of one Sin to that of another, we may certainly conclude, his *Affection* is *misplaced*: This Earth has taken Possession of his *Heart*; and we must not wonder to find him falling so easy a Prey to every Temptation that offers him any Share of its *Profits* or its *Pleasures*. But where the *Things above* are firmly believed and duly attended to, the Case is far otherwise. A Reward inestimable in its Value and endless in its Duration, keeps the Mind that contemplates it *steadfast and unmoveable*: Other Interests, if not wholly overlooked, are however always considered as *subordinate* to this; and so, in Case of Interference, made to give-way to it. — In short, the *Precept* in my Text is that which among us *Christians* at least, makes the *principal Difference* between a Good and a Bad Man; and accordingly,

ingly, the same *Apostle* who characterizes the former as ^a *having his Conversation in Heaven*, concludes and ^b *sums up* one of the blackest Descriptions of the latter that occurs in the *New Testament*, into this one Article, that He *minds earthly Things*.

What is in my Text meant by *Things above*, will best be learnt by looking back to the immediately foregoing Verse. *If* (says the Apostle) *Ye be risen with CHRIST, seek those Things which are above, where CHRIST sitteth at the Right-Hand of GOD*. Which last Words determine us to understand by *Things above* the Things of another World, the Joys of Heaven, the *Pleasures of GOD's Right-Hand*: And, what is in the former Verse called *seeking* them, is in this latter expressed by *Relishing* or *setting the Affection upon* them. — By their *being risen with CHRIST*, Some have understood the Apostle to express the happy Change, made in the Condition of the *Colossians*, by their Removal from a State of Darkness, Slavery, and Corruption, into the glorious Light and Privileges of the Gospel: A Removal, which might indeed, with regard to the Greatness of its Consequences, be fitly enough expressed by *Life from the Dead*. But, I presume, we need not have Recourse

a Phil. III. 20.

b Ibid. 18, 19.

to any *figurative Interpretation* in this Place : The Expression may well be understood, according to its most natural Import, of that *Glorious Resurrection* to Endless Happiness, which all Good Christians hope for in Consequence of the Resurrection of CHRIST their Head ; and which is, by That illustrious Event, so fully assured to them, that the Apostle (by a beautiful *Anticipation*) here speaks of it as of a Fact *already past* rather than as of Something *only expected*. *If Ye then be risen with CHRIST, seek Those Things which are above. — Set Your Affection on Things above, not on Things on the Earth.*

The Apostle's Reasoning, considered in this Light, comes to *This*. "Seeing that, as CHRIST
 "Your Head is *already* risen, Ye also are in
 "due Time *to be* raised, from the Grave, to
 "partake of Eternal Life and Glory with Him
 "*at the Right-Hand of* GOD : Seeing Ye are,
 "*by the Resurrection of* CHRIST *from the*
 "*Dead, begotten again to a lively Hope, to an*
 "*Inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and*
 "*that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for*
 "*You* : Make these Glorious Prospects the
 "constant Object of Your Thoughts and Con-
 "templations. Let Your Views and Your Af-
 "fections *terminate* there only, where You

“expect to find Your *highest Good*. Let all
 “the Powers both of *Body* and *Soul* be joint-
 “ly exerted in the Pursuit of That endless
 “Happiness, which Your *Bodies* and *Souls*
 “shall, after their Separation, be *re-united* in
 “order jointly to enjoy.”

The Precept before us, You see, *here* stands as an *Inference* drawn from the Doctrine of CHRIST's *Resurrection* and of *our own* consequent thereupon: And *as such*, I presume, It needs no farther Illustration of the *Form* or *Manner of Its Deduction*. Confining our Reflections, therefore, chiefly to the *Matter* of It, I shall at present make it my Business,

- I. *First*, To shew briefly, what is implied in the *Duty* of *Seeking*, or *Setting our Affection upon, Things above*. And,
- II. *Secondly*, To point out some *Habits* and *Dispositions* more particularly *repugnant* to it.

I. Now by *Things above* we are to understand the Things of another World, the Joys of Heaven, the *Pleasures at GOD's Right-Hand*: For so the *Apostle* himself explains the Phrase in the immediately foregoing Verse: And what He *there* calls *Seeking the Things above*, where CHRIST *sitteth at the Right-Hand*

Hand of God, He here expresses by *Relishing* or *Setting the Affection upon* them. — The *Duty* we are considering, then, can imply no less than—A *firm Belief* of the *Reality* of such a State of Happiness to Good Men: — A *lively Sense* of its *Moment* and *Importance*: — And an *earnest Desire* and *heartly Endeavour* above all Things to prepare and qualify ourselves for it.

That it is necessary in order to our *setting our Affection on Things above*, that we should be *persuaded* of the *Reality* of their Existence, is too plain to need any Enlargement. But 'tis material to observe, that this Persuasion must not be an *idle, notional Belief only* of a Future State; such as, having collected it from a Train of Reasoning and Arguments, we seem to entertain scarce for any other Purpose, but in order to *shew our Acuteness in proving it*. No: It must be such a Belief as is *quick and powerful*; such as is *constantly present* with our Minds; and, by being so, *works itself* into the very *Temper and Constitution* of them: Such as shall have an Influence upon our *Thoughts* in some Degree proportioned to the high Importance of the great Objects of it; and shall discover itself, on all proper Occasions, in our *Words and Actions* also. — This, and This only, is That
Faith

Faith which overcometh this World, and which is necessary to our regularly *setting our Affection on the Things* of the other.

Accordingly, the *Heavenly-minded Man* will disengage his *Attention* (I do not say, *wholly*, for that is impracticable, but) as much as his present Situation will well permit, from the Affairs of this Life. The Happiness of Heaven is the *Great End of his Journey*; which though he may not be *actually thinking* of in every Step he takes, yet he will be always making some *Progress towards* it. This will never for any considerable Time be out of his View, but will be the Object on which his *Thoughts will delight to dwell*.

From such a Power over his *Mind* as a constant Remembrance of Heaven and heavenly Things must give them, their Influence will naturally insinuate itself into his *Discourse*. Not indeed so as to damp the *innocent Cheerfulness* of Conversation by perpetually *affecting* to introduce a Pharisaical Sourness or *doubtful Disputations* into it; but so as to *season* it occasionally with natural Observations, calculated for the *Use of Edifying* and *ministring Grace unto the Hearers*. He will not be ashamed to give an Account, and (if need be) a Reason, of the Hope that is in him; upon
any

any pertinent Occasion : ^a *Which Hope he has as an Anchor of his Soul, sure and steadfast ; or as a Spring which gives Movement and Direction to his several Powers ; though he may not be ostentatiously studious of disclosing it to every Observer, nor even in every Motion attend to it himself.*

In short, a serious and *affectionate* Regard to the Things above *distinguishes* his Character, and *animates* his whole Conduct. To This *All* his Actions have a *general Tendency*, and the *most considerable* of them a *particular Reference*. He takes his Measures of the Desirableness of Things, and the Prudence of Undertakings, not from what he sees in this World, but from what he hopes for in the Next. — ^b *He walks by Faith, not by Sight.*

And, as all Enjoyment must be the Result of a due *Agreement between the Object and the Faculty*, the Man that would effectually prepare himself for the Happiness of another State, must acquire such *Habits* of Soul *here* as will be necessary to give him a proper *Relish* for That Happiness : Such are *Purity, Charity*, and the like ; which will not only by God's Appointment gain him Admittance into Heaven, but in some Degree make him *a meet Partaker* of the Felicities of That Place.

^a Heb. VI. 19.

^b 2 Cor. V. 7.

He must contract an *habitual Liking* for Those Exercises of *Contemplation* and *Praise*, which will be at once the Employment and the Reward of *the Saints in Light*.

And *herein will he exercise himself*: He will not look upon Preparation for Heaven as a Concern *by the Way only*, as a Business to be discontinued and resumed just as his other Affairs, his Visits or his Diversions, the Employments of his Calling, or even his, otherwise commendable, Searches after Knowledge will permit; but He will make it the *Governing Principle*, the *leading Business*, of his Life; and such as is, *in Comparison* with all others, but especially when any of them stands *in Competition* with it, *the one Thing Needful*. — *Less than this* will hardly come up to the Character of *Heavenly-mindedness*. But, if we *thus set our Affection on Things above*, we may humbly hope (through the Merits of our Redeemer) we shall finally be blest with the *full Fruition* of them.

Thus much may, I hope, suffice to shew *what is implied* in the Duty of *setting our Affection on Things above*: Especially since the *Nature* of the *Duty* will be farther illustrated by a View of some *contrary Qualities*. I proceed therefore, as was proposed,

II. *Secondly*, To point out some *Habits* which are in a peculiar Manner *repugnant to the Duty* and Temper I have hitherto been describing.

And the *First* which offers itself to our Consideration is (what we usually call) *Worldly-Mindedness*, or *Love of the Possessions* of the present World.

Let me not, however, be understood to include *all Care* or Concern for the Things of this World under the Denomination of *Worldly-Mindedness*. Whilst Men live in this World, it is not to be expected that They should live wholly *above* it. Holy Scripture itself constantly represents Men's Secular Callings as the Appointments of God, and our Allotments to them as depending on His All-wise Disposal. Our Temporal Concerns therefore *may*, nay ordinarily They *must*, be taken into our Account of *Business*: And to *leave*, or to neglect, our *proper Calling*, would be to *desert* the *Post* which God *Himself* hath assigned us.

And indeed, were Mankind, especially in the Years of Youth, Strength, and Manhood, to employ their Time and their Thoughts almost wholly in contemplating Heaven and heavenly Things; the Business of This World

must be at a Stand, and universal Want and Wretchedness must ensue. A State, which Providence can by no Means be supposed to have ordained or intended for the World. And, as to particular Persons, They must not be surpris'd, if after having, even upon the most *spiritual* Pretences, lost the proper Season to provide for themselves and Families, they should find *Want coming upon them as an armed Man*. A Regard to *another* World never ordinarily requires, will seldom justify, Men's sequestering themselves from the lawful Employments of *This*: Nor must Those Persons accuse Providence or *charge* God *foolishly* in the Decline of Life, on Account of their Want of worldly Advantages, who spent the Time allowed for the innocent Acquisition of them in such Services as He no where *required at their Hands*.

In short, there is an *allowable*, a *commendable*, a *necessary*, Care for the Affairs of this Life; which he that neglects to take, complies not with the Order of Providence, nor acts agreeably to the Situation in which God hath placed him.

But then, *Whatsoever is more than This cometh of Evil*. When we begin (according to the Apostle's Expressions) to *love the World*;

— to ^a *mind earthly Things*; — ^b *to set our Affection on Things on the Earth*: — When we look upon This World's Possessions as our *bigbest Good*, and make the Acquisition of them our *principal Pursuit*: — When our Minds *rest* in the Enjoyment of them, and as it were *repose* themselves upon them with Complacency, and without *looking out* for their proper Happiness *beyond* them: — When, in short, the Cares of this World are permitted and encouraged to intrude, not only into our Solitudes and Retirements, but into our *Devotions* and *Religious Contemplations*, nay even to make many *sacrilegious* Deductions from that weekly *Portion of our Time*, which was from the Beginning *consecrated* to far higher and holier Purposes: Then we may conclude, *we are* Worldly-minded: Our Concern for This Earth manifestly interferes with our Preparation for Heaven; and we have contracted a *'Friendship with the World which is Enmity with God*.

Our LORD's Caution to His Disciples is very remarkable to this Purpose; being delivered in such Terms as at once express the *Nature* and *criminal Degree* of Worldly-Mindedness; its *dangerous Tendency* in regard to our Preparation for another State; and *our great*

^a Phil. III. 19.^b Col. III. 2.^c Jam. IV. 4.

Proneness to be over-taken by it. ^a *Take Heed, that Your Hearts be not over-charged with — the Cares of This Life ; and so That Day come upon You unawares.* — An *Affection* and *Fondness* for *this* World is indeed in the Nature of Things, irreconcilable with a *proper Regard* for the next. Our Care and *Attention* can no more admit of *Two Supreme Objects*, than our *Adoration* : Nor can we in Reason expect *Admittance* into Heaven hereafter, unless we have made it at least our *chief Concern* here.

Let us carry our Imaginations forward to that great Period, when ^b *This Earth with all the Works that are therein shall be burnt up* : Let us there imagine the Wretch, whose Affections had been wholly set upon it, to appear before the awful Tribunal, crying, “ LORD, “ LORD ! ” and what more gracious Answer can Mercy itself be supposed to make him, than This ? — “ ^c Son, remember, that Thou in “ *Thy Life-Time receivedest Thy Good Things ;* “ *Thine by Option as well as Possession ; and in* “ *Thy Life-Time, when it was Thy own Choice* “ *to receive them ! Had the ^d Heaven Thou* “ *now cravest been accounted Thy Treasure* “ *then, Thy Heart would of Course have been* “ *there also.* But, ^e *as for Thee, Thy Heart*

^a Luk. XXI. 34.^b 2 Pet. III. 10.^c Luk. XVI. 25.^d Matt. VI. 25.^e Jer. XXII. 17.

“*was but for Thy Covetousness. Thy ^a Godli-*
 “*ness was Gain: And Thy very Prayers on-*
 “*ly so many Meditations on ^b Thy Farms and*
 “*Thy Merchandise, Thy Preferments or Thy*
 “*Purchases! Didst Thou not therefore, in*
 “*Effect, agree with me for the Things of*
 “*That Earth which is now past and gone?*
 “*Wherefore ^b I do Thee no wrong in continu-*
 “*ing Thy immortal Nature, and yet making*
 “*Those Things Thy only Portion.—Take that*
 “*Thine is, and go Thy Way!*”

A Sentence, how equitable soever, yet of itself sufficiently dreadful! Well may the disconsolate Soul cry out, ‘*LORD, to whom shall I go? Thou hast the Words of Eternal Life.*’ Yet This is not all. To be banished for Ever from His Presence, *in whose Presence alone is Fulness of Joy*, is but a Part, but the *private* Part, of the prophane (and in Scripture Estimation the *idolatrous*) *Worldling’s* Punishment. Such an one would now be glad to compound for Annihilation itself. But even *This Refuge*, shocking as it is to human Nature, cannot be indulged him. GOD is jealous of His Honour, and will not admit of any Rival in our Affection. *He that loveth the Creature more than the Creator* must ex-

^a 1 Tim. VI. 5.
^d Col. III. 5.

^b Matt. XX. 13, 14.

^c Joh. VI. 68.

pect to feel *a Vengeance worthy* of incensed Omnipotence : Whilst Angels and Saints applauding the just Dispensations of Providence shall cry out ; — “ ^a *Lo, This is the Man that took not GOD for his Portion, but trusted unto the Multitude of his Riches !* — Such will finally be the Doom of every one ^b *that layeth up Treasure for himself, and is not Rich towards GOD !*

A *Second* Habit inconsistent with Heavenly-Mindedness is *Voluptuousness*, or an inordinate *Love of the sensual Pleasures of this World*.

I say, an *inordinate* Love ; because here also I would by no Means be understood as condemning *every* Allowance in *pleasing* Sensations under the Denomination of *Voluptuousness*. Man is compounded of two distinct Principles, *Spirit* and *Body* : Of which his *Spirit was breathed into him by GOD Himself*, whilst his *Body was formed out of the Dust* whereon he treads : His *Spiritual Part* is the Principle of *Life and Motion*, the Seat of *Understanding and Will* ; and therefore manifestly intended to *preside and govern* ; whilst his *Bodily Part*, of itself utterly *inactive*, as plainly appears intended for *Subservience and Subjection* : And lastly, his *Body*, at the Dis-

^a Psal. LII. 7.

^b Luk. XII. 21.

^c Gen. II. 7.

solution of the Union, is to ^a *return to its native Earth*, whilst *his Spirit is to return to God who gave it*. — So long then as each of these Constituents of Man has its *proper Province* assigned it, each a *Proportion of Care* allowed it, according to the *Dignity* of its *Extraction*, of its *Use*, and of its *End*; so long the Man acts agreeably to the Order of his Nature, and to the Will of its great Author; and, if some higher Attainments may be ^b *lacking* to render him *perfect*, yet *he is not far from the Kingdom of God*.

However, though we may take a *reasonable Care* of our Bodies, we must not ^c *make such Provision for the Flesh* as to enflame and *to fulfil the Lusts thereof*. The *Former* is well-pleasing to that *Holy Spirit whose Temples we are*; but by the *latter* we grieve *Him*, and *quench His gracious Influences*. I speak not only of the *grosser Acts* of Intemperance and Debauchery, but of the *Habit of Sensuality*; which, though it should not break out into notorious Acts of Riot or Lewdness, may not less successfully, because more uniformly, ^d *war against the Soul*. It sinks the Soul into the most abject Slavery, the most dangerous Insensibility. It imperceptibly alienates the Heart from God and

^a Eccl. XII. 7. ^b Matt. XIX. 20, 21. ^c Rom. XIII. 13.
^d 1 Pet. II, 11.

Goodness, and stupifies its Relish for Religious Exercises, and heavenly Contemplations: A State surely, in which no *wise Servant* would chuse to be *surprised* by *his LORD at His Coming!*

What St. Paul saith of ** the Widow that liveth in Pleasure*, “that *She is dead while She liveth,*” is a short but just Description of the wretched Condition of every one, who gives himself up to the Gratifications of Sense: He is *Dead* to all the valuable, all the tolerable, Ends of living; *Dead* as to any proper Use of that Part of his Being by which alone Man can be said to *Live*. The Life of a *Plant* or an *Animal* he may indeed be allowed to partake of; though even *This* Kind of Life he frequently *destroys*, and more frequently *renders imperfect* and miserable. But, where the *Vegetative* and *Sensitive* Life is best of all taken Care of by him, the *Rational*, which is the Life of the *Man*, is shamefully neglected; and the *Spiritual* which is that of the *Christian*, is for the most part totally extinguished. — And what a Preparation must *This* be for *b the Society of the Spirits of just Men made perfect; of an innumerable Company of Angels; of Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant; and of God the Judge of All!*

a 1 Tim. V. 6.

b Heb. XII. 22, 23, 24.

Believe it, my Brethren, *the Kingdom of Heaven* can only be taken by such an *holy Violence* as the *Man of Pleasure* will hardly be at the Pains of using for the Attainment of it. Let us not imagine, that God will ^a *cast this inestimable Pearl before the Lazy* or the Sensual; or confer an *Inheritance among them, that are sanctified*, upon Those who are content to ^b *sell their Birth-Right* in it for a *Morsel of Meat*. The Truth is, *Heaven* itself would yield *no Happiness* to Men of *this Taste*. *The Pleasures at God's Right-Hand* are of a quite different Nature from any Gratifications They are acquainted with. *These* are to be the *ultimate Happiness* of Man; and will therefore (we may be sure) be adapted to the *superiour*, the *immortal*, Part of his Nature; They will be *Rational, Intellectual, Spritual*. But, alas! what Relish can the *Sensualist* have for Rational, for Intellectual, for Spiritual Delights; A *Paradise* like that of *Mahomet* might be agreeable to such a Man's Capacities: But ^c *he that has in him the Hope of a Christian*, he that expects to be like CHRIST when He shall appear, and to see Him as He is, must in this Life *purify himself even as He is pure*. — And for like Reasons,

a Matt. VII. 6.

b Heb. XII. 16.

c 1 Joh. III. 2, 3.

Lastly, The Habits and Affections of *Envy*, *Malice*, *Revenge*, &c. are utterly inconsistent with *Preparation for* and *Enjoyment of* the *Things above*.

The Opposition between these *malevolent* Affections and *Heavenly-Mindedness* may not, perhaps, appear so *direct* and immediate as in the former Instances ; but will upon Inquiry be found not the less *real*. The Truth is, the Predominancy of *these* is generally but the Consequence of our Captivity to the *Former*. 'Tis our Attachment to this World, our *Earnestness* about its *Possessions*, its *Pleasures*, or its *Pre-eminencies*, which *magnifies* every *trifling* Damage done us, nay every little *Slight* put upon us, into a *grievous* and unpardonable *Injury* ; and which gives a proportionable Keeness to our Resentments and Continuance to our Enmity. He, whose Heart is affected with a just Sense of the *infinite Disproportion* there is between *Things above* and *Things on the Earth*, will not easily be drawn into any *great Warmth*, at least not into any *lasting Hatred*, about any of the Pursuits of this World. They only, who *mind earthly Things*, will think it worth while to prosecute them at the Expence of their own *Charity*, and that of All around them.

And,

And, as the *malevolent Affections* are thus repugnant to Heavenly-Mindedness considered as an *Habit here*, so are They no less incompatible with it considered as a *Qualification for the Enjoyment of Heaven hereafter*.^a *The Wisdom which is from above*, and which must accompany us thither, is *first pure, then peaceable*. For as Heaven is a Place of perfect Joy and Tranquillity, whatsoever Affections would either give Uneasiness to their particular Owners or Disturbance to Society, must even upon a *Natural* as well as a *Judicial Account* be excluded thence. A Soul filled with Envy, Rancour, and Revenge at its Departure hence must therefore be a *Guest* very improper to be admitted to *that Feast*. Passions of this Kind (if we may argue from the Effects of them which we see at present) would not only furnish out an *Hell* in the Breast that harbours them, but would *diffuse their baneful Influence*, and communicate their Torment, to all about them.

And let no Man vainly presume, he shall not for ever continue *such*, with regard to the *Disposition* of his *Soul*, as He is at his Entrance upon another World. The *same Habits*, the *same Inclinations and Aversions* (the *same in Kind* though not *in Degree*) that we

^a Jam. III. 17.

carry out of this World we must for ever retain in the Next. ^a *He that is then filthy, will be filthy still*, and he that is Envious will be Envious still. The Soul is a *simple* and *uncompounded Substance*; and Those Habits which long Custom has confirmed in it, become fixed and lasting and as it were of the *Essence* of it. Thus at least some of the ablest Reasoners among the Heathen with great Probability argued: But, if any Doubt could arise about the Nature of the Thing, Revelation has removed all Uncertainty upon this Head; by frequently representing and alway supposing the present Life to be *our only Time of Trial* for Eternity: And, as to the particular Point before us, St. Paul's Declaration to the Galatians is decisive to our Purpose; where, having reckoned up ^b *Hatred, Variance, Wrath, Strife, Envy, &c.* among the Works of the Flesh, He concludes with some Vehemence, that *They who do such Things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God*.

Were These Considerations duly attended to, surely the monstrous Practice of Duelling could not be so fashionable in a Christian Country as (to our Shame be it spoken) it seems to be growing in our own. Our Judge Himself hath plainly told us, what must be

a Rev. XXII. 11.

b Gal. V. 20, 21.

the *Portion* of the ^a *wicked Servant*, whom his LORD when He cometh shall find smiting his *Fellow-Servants*.—Where then shall that *Servant* appear, who wilfully runs the Hazard not only of being found by his LORD, but of anticipating His Coming, and rushing into His Presence, in the same contentious and even furious State of Mind? who deliberately adventures, either to dispatch his Neighbour's Soul, or to plunge his own, (perhaps both) into a Situation *unchangeable*, with all that Rancour and Thirst of Blood upon it, with which the Combatants may be supposed to engage on such shocking Occasions? — But I forbear: Nor have I said thus much, as pronouncing any Thing upon the Dead, but as cautioning the Living. And God grant, that no one here present may ever thus expose himself to that ^b *Judgment without Mercy*, which awaits Those that have shewed no Mercy!

I have now gone through with the Heads I at first proposed. Let us only, by Way of Conclusion, take a short Review of what has been said, and see, *what Use* may be made of it. — And,

First, Has it appeared that an inordinate Love of this World's Possessions is irreconcilable with a proper Affection for Things above?

^a Matt. XXIV. 49.

^b Jam. II. 13.

Let us possess our Souls with a just Sense of the *Vanity* of every Thing here on Earth. To This End, let us (in the *spiritual* Sense of the *Prophet's* Exhortation) ^a *arise and depart*, as knowing that *This is not our Rest*: That is, let us frequently transfer our Thoughts from the present unabiding, momentary, Scene of Things, and in our Contemplations *lay hold on the Hope* of an enduring Substance *set before us*. — 'Tis the *Presence* of *sensible* and temporary Good Things which gives them all that Advantage they appear to have over such as are *Spiritual* and Eternal. We are *fond* of *Those*, because we are always conversant about them; but we have *no Taste* for *These*, because we allow ourselves to be perfect Strangers to them. The *Former* offer themselves to our View in their *full Magnitude* and Dimensions; whilst the *Latter*, by Reason of their *Distance* from Sense, are either wholly *over-looked*, or seen under great Disadvantages. But *Meditation*, under the Direction of *Faith*, supplies the Defects, and corrects the Errors of *Sight*: It gives a Kind of *Presence* to Those Objects which are yet only *in Futurity*; and ^b *calls the Things that* (as yet) *are not, as though they were*: It places Things Temporal and Things Eternal on

a Mic. II. 10.

b Rom. IV. 17.

the *same Level* and at the *same Distance* from us ; by this Means enabling us to view them in their *just Proportions*, and to take a more exact Estimate of their *comparative Worth* and Pretensions to our Regard. The Consequence of which must be, that This World in its best Estate will appear unworthy of any *great Concern* from a Being who has an Object so much more valuable before him ; and ^a *will have no Glory*, scarce any Place, in his Thoughts, by reason of that *Glory* which so infinitely excelleth.

Again : Is *Love of the Pleasures* as well as of the Possessions of *this World* so inconsistent as we have seen with an *Affection for* and *Enjoyment of* the *Things above* ? This must strongly recommend to us that great Christian Duty of *Self-Denial*. An *uninterrupted Course* of sensual Gratifications, though *separately allowable* ones, is too dangerous a Trial of human Virtue, and such as a wise Man would hardly trust himself with. Our *carnal Appetites*, ever since the *Fall*, have a very forcible Tendency to *Evil* : They rise in their Demands upon every Indulgence ; and must be withheld from Obstinacy and Rebellion by seasonable Discipline and repeated Denials. We must withdraw our Affections therefore

^a 2 Cor. III. 10.

from the Pleasures of this World, by not only *abstaining entirely* from all *criminal Gratifications*, but by *voluntarily denying ourselves* many innocent ones. ^a *So shall an Entrance be more abundantly ministered to us into That Everlasting Kingdom*, which ^b *Flesh and Blood cannot inherit*: Into That Place, which is prepared for Saints and Angels, but which *no unclean Thing can enter*: Into That Region, where will be Light and Joy for the ^c *Pure in Heart* who can *see God* in it; but whose Brightness would be no Brightness, but Gloominess and Horrour, to the Soul that wants That ^d *Holiness*, *without which no Man shall see Him*.

Once more: Are the Affections of *Envy, Malice, Revengefulness*, and the like, utterly incompatible with an *Affection* for, and *Enjoyment* of, Heaven? ^e *Wherefore now You also put off all These*; — and put on as the *Elect of God*, *holy and beloved*, *Bowels of Mercies, Kindness, Humbleness of Mind, Meekness, Long-suffering*; *forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any Man have a Quarrel against any*; even as *CHRIST forgave You, so also do Ye*. Can we be *implacable* and *unmerciful* to each other, who each of us expect to have *so much*

^a 2 Pet. I. 11.

^b 1 Cor. XV. 50.

^c Matt. V. 8.

^d Heb. XII. 14.

^e Col. III. 8, 12, 13.

forgiven

forgiven by our common LORD and Master? And when to the unparalleled Mercies, we add the *precious Promises*, the Glorious Prospects, of the Gospel; *These*, surely, cannot fail to banish all Malice and Hatred from the Breasts, all Rancour and Bitterness from the Discourse, all Quarrels and Contentions from the Conversation, of Those, who are in good earnest Candidates for Heaven, and *have Hopes full of Immortality*,

To conclude.—*‘If Ye be risen with CHRIST, Seek those Things which are above: And, lest Ye be found in the Number of ‘Those Seekers who shall not be able to enter, let the Diligence and Earnestness of Your Search bear some Proportion to the Dignity and Excellence of the Glorious Object of it. ‘The Prize of the high Calling of GOD in CHRIST JESUS is a Prize, which will abundantly recompence all Your Pains, and will fully answer all the Affection You can set upon it: A Prize too, which You may All be Competitors for, and yet Your Pretensions never interfere with each other. — May we All then, with united Endeavours, press toward the Mark for it! May all our Pursuits be made subordinate to This; and all our Competitions swal-*

^a Wilsd. III. 4.

^b Col. III. 1.

^c Luk. XIII. 24.

^d Phil. III. 14.

lowed up in it! — 'Tis worth while to ^a lay aside every Weight in order to run with Success the Great Race that is set before us: The Reward proposed is a ^b Crown incorruptible; and, though we All run, we may each of us obtain it!

That we may, every one of us, ^c *so run as to obtain*, May GOD grant, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD.

^a Heb. XII. 1.

^b 1 Cor. IX. 25.

^c Ibid. 24.

S E R M O N XIII.

ACTS XIV. 17.

Nevertheless, He left not Himself without Witness, in that He did Good, and gave us Rain from Heaven, and fruitful Seasons, filling our Hearts with Food and Gladness.

THESE Words are the Conclusion of a short, but beautiful Speech of St. Paul to the *Lycaonians*. The Occasion was This. — St. Paul accompanied with *Barnabas* had, in Virtue of That miraculous Power which was for wise Ends and Purposes granted to the first Propagators of Christianity, wrought a very signal Cure upon *an impotent Man, a Cripple from his Mother's Womb, who never had walked*: For, notwithstanding this *Inveteracy* of his Disorder, or rather this his *Natural Incapaci-*

^a Acts XIV. 8.

ty, no sooner had the Apostle pronounced the Emphatical Words, “^a *Stand up right on thy Feet;*” but the *impotent Man* leaped and walked. The People of *Lystra*, convinced that so wonderful a Cure must have exceeded the Power of any *mere Man*, and yet blinded by the Prejudices of Heathen Superstition; presently concluded, that ^b *the Gods were come down to them in the Likeness of Men*: And accordingly, giving them the ^c *Names* of those Pagan Deities they had been accustomed to worship, were proceeding in all Haste to perform the usual Rites of Homage and Adoration. ^d *The Priest of Jupiter, who was before their City, brought Oxen and Garlands unto the Gates, and would have done Sacrifice with the People.*

Upon this the Holy Men of God, touched at once with Astonishment and Compassion by so affecting an Appearance, ^e *ran in among the People*; desiring, without Delay, not only to prevent the idolatrous Worship intended to be paid to themselves; but to remove the Occasion of any such criminal Observances for the future, by directing them to the *true* and *only* Object of Religious *Worship*. To this End, They begin with a gentle, but affectionate,

^a Acts XIV. 10. ^b Ibid. 11. ^c Ibid. 12. ^d Ibid. 13.
^e Ibid. 14.

Expostulation, “*Sirs, why do Ye these Things?*” They assure them, that *themselves were but Men*, and therefore had no Claim to any Adoration, nor durst receive any :—That *one great Design* of their now coming among them was to *turn them from these vain and idolatrous Practices* to the regular Worship of *the Living God, who made Heaven and Earth, and the Sea and all Things that are therein* :—That indeed their *having fallen* into such depraved Notions and superstitious Practices *heretofore* might be more excusable, than their *Continuance* in them *now* could be ; because God had not then, in the same *extraordinary* Manner interposed to prevent them, but had ^b *in Times past suffered all Nations* (or, as it should be rendered, *all the Heathen*, in Opposition to the *Jews*,) *to walk in their own Ways* :—And yet, that such unaccountable Delusions, even among the unenlightened Heathens, were not chargeable upon any Failure on God’s Part ; *extraordinary* Interpositions and Discoveries of His Will were Matter of *Favour* not of *Debt* ; and where *these* were *not vouchsafed*, the *ordinary* Communications of God’s Beneficence and Goodness, in sending them a *regular Return* of *Seasons*, and crowning their honest Labour with Joy and

a Acts XIV. 15.

b Ibid. 16.

Success, were sufficient Evidences of His Being and Providence, and such as *ought* to have made them entertain more worthy Notions of Him. *Nevertheless, He left not Himself without Witness, in that He did Good, and gave us Rain from Heaven, and fruitful Seasons, filling our Hearts with Food and Gladness.*

From the Words thus opened and explained, I might take Occasion to consider the *State of the Gentile World* before the Preaching of the Gospel to them: And to shew, that the *ordinary Appearances of Nature* in regard to the Seasons of the Year, the Fruits of the Ground, &c. were *sufficient Proofs of His Being*, and *Witnesses* to His *Gracious Providence* over them; and that therefore, if the greatest Part of them were (as it is certain they were) sunk into the most *depraved Notions* concerning His *Nature*, the most *absurd Practices* in His *Worship*; the *Fault* all the while was *not* in GOD but in *Themselves*. But my Design is to consider the Words in a more *popular View*, and to render them more particularly useful.

And for this Purpose I shall reduce what the Time will permit me to offer, under the Two following Heads of Enquiry:

I. To

I. To *whom we are indebted* for the Blessings we enjoy; and particularly for *those fruitful Seasons*, that *Food and Gladness*, which are at any Time vouchsafed to us? And,

II. *What Uses it will become us to make*, on this and every like Occasion, of the Considerations that may occur under the foregoing Head?

I. As to the *Former* of these Enquiries; I would hope much Time need not be employed in giving a satisfactory Answer to it. Every one who reads and acknowledges (as, I persuade myself, we all of us do) the *Divine Authority of the Scriptures*, will readily, and at least in the General allow, that the Being, to whom we are indebted for every Thing we possess, is no other but GOD: That Being, ^a*from whom every good Gift and every perfect Gift doth come*; in short, That Being, who first *created all Things by the Word of His Power*, and who still disposeth all Events *according to the Counsel of His own Will*. Intimations and express Assertions to this Purpose occur so very frequently in the sacred Writings, that it would be almost *endless* to re-

^a Jam. I. 17.

peat them *All*; and indeed they so readily offer themselves to every one's Memory, that I need not repeat any of them.

^a Say we these Things from Scripture only, or saith not Reason and the very Light of Nature the same also? Yes verily: The Sound of an over-ruling Providence ^b is gone out into all Lands, and the Belief of it into the Ends of the World: There is neither Speech nor Language, but the Apprehension of an All-seeing Eye, and All-powerful Superintendence, is heard among them.

There was indeed a certain *Seet* among the Philosophers of old, who, though they acknowledged the Being of a God, at least in Words, yet idly persuaded themselves into a Denial of His particular Providence: Fancying that He left the World to shift for itself as soon as He had made it, and enjoyed Himself in Solitude and Indolence: As if the Care of a World were unworthy of Him who first created it; or too troublesome an Employment for that Great Being, ^c who fainteth not, neither is weary; but is infinite in Power, and mighty in working.

Shall we then have Recourse to I know not what Natures of Things for solving the Appearances we see, and for producing those

a 1 Cor. IX. 8.

b Psal. XIX. 4.

c Isai. XL. 28.

fruitful Seasons which fill our Hearts with Food and Gladness? But if by the *Natures of Things* be understood any Thing different from the *Will of God*, manifesting itself in the ordinary Course of His Providence, and exerting itself agreeably to Those Tendencies which *Himself originally impressed* upon His Creatures; 'tis a Notion as extravagant and senseless, and indeed as inexcusable, as that of such as deny His Being and Providence; if it *really differ* from it any otherwise than only in *Name*.

The Truth is, the great Governour of the Universe is a *GOD of Order and not of Confusion*; and does therefore *ordinarily* make *Second Causes* act regularly and uniformly. But if we thence conclude that He has *put* the Management of Affairs in this lower World *intirely out of His own Hands*; we are, in so doing, guilty of great Folly as well as Impiety. 'Tis *GOD alone*, who so steadily conducts the Motions of this great Machine: The minutest Movement of it is subject to His Inspection and waits His Orders: And, though He *usually* acts by the Intervention of Second Causes, and agreeably to their Natural Tendencies; yet He *can* alter or suspend, He *can* retard or hasten, their Motions and Operations, whensoever and howsoever He pleases.

What-

** Whatsoever the LORD pleaseth, that doeth He in Heaven and in Earth, in the Sea and in all deep Places: He causeth the Vapours to ascend from the Ends of the Earth; He maketh Lightnings with the Rain; bringing the Winds out of His Treasures.*

It is well worth observing, that several of the Appearances we are here considering are such as have never yet been accounted for from the *known Laws of Nature*. That *b Seed-Time and Harvest, Cold and Heat, Summer and Winter* should not cease but should succeed each other in an uniform Order, is what we can indeed give *some* little Account of, from such Causes as a diligent Enquiry into Nature enables us to assign: Which Causes, however, manifestly required an *infinite Wisdom* to contrive them, and an *Almighty Hand* to put them in Motion; and must ever require the *same* Wisdom and Power to conduct and uphold them. But then, as to the *particular Changes* in the Times; the *arising of stormy Winds* and the *Succession of Calm*; the *great Difference of Weather* in the *very same Seasons of different Years*; the long Drought of one Year and the as long Rains of another; — I say, These and such Appearances, although they are Matter of common Observation, have

^a Psal. CXXXV. 6, 7.

^b Gen. VIII. 22.

Something in them, which the most diligent and penetrating Enquirers into the Operations of Second Causes have hitherto been, and probably always will be, unable to explain: Which must therefore be resolved into the ^a*sole good Pleasure* of That Being, who *doeth according to His Will in the Army of Heaven*; and who hath the whole Creation so absolutely at His Disposal, that Those seemingly most unruly and untractable Parts of it, ^b*the Winds and the Sea, obey Him.*

Shall we then ascribe the Blessings we enjoy *wholly* to our own *Labour* and Industry, our *Prudence* and good Management? This, I fear, is a very common, but certainly very dangerous and sinful Practice. — We are far from denying, that Your own Industry and Prudence are the *proper Means* of ensuring, and such as are most usually attended with, Success. Your Care and Attention are, no doubt, well employed about the Concerns of *this Life*, when kept in due *Subordination* to a regular Discharge of the Duties of *Religion*, and a proper Regard to the Concerns of *another World*. The *Dressing* and Cultivation of the Ground was, by God's own Appointment, the Employment of our First Parent in a State of Innocence, and before his Ex-

^a Dan. IV. 35. ^b Mark IV. 41.

pulsion from Paradise. Much more necessary then must *the Sweat* of their *Faces* be to his Descendants in the present State of Things. Your Industry therefore is in itself *so far from* being *inconsistent* with Your Duty, that it really *makes a Part* of it. We allow a great deal to Care and Labour: 'Tis the Channel by which the Blessings of Providence are *ordinarily* conveyed to us: And it is the Apostle's Rule, founded indeed in Reason and Equity, *'That if any Person will not work, neither should he eat.*

However, though we allow thus much to Industry, we must beware of *resting here*. Care and Prudence are indeed the *usual Means* of attaining Success in Temporal Affairs; but we must always remember that they are only *subordinate* ones to the Blessing of God, which alone maketh *any Thing we do*, or engage in, *to prosper*. To convince us of *This*, human Affairs are purposely so ordered, that *b the Race is not always to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong, nor yet Bread to the Wise, nor Riches to Men of Understanding* and Activity. Most commonly indeed Schemes wisely contrived and well conducted will attain their proposed Ends. But we meet with Instances to the contrary more than enow to satisfy us,

a 1 Thess. III. 8.

b Eccl. IX. 11.

that *Time and Chance*, favourable Seasons or cross Accidents (both under the Direction of an over-ruling Providence) *happen to them All*.

And if This Observation hold true in the *General* Course of human Affairs, it is still more visibly so in the *Particular* Case before us. For alas! after all our lofty Pretensions, what is it which the Best of us all can do towards the Production of a *plentiful Harvest*? — of a *plentiful Harvest*, did I say? nay of a *single Ear* of Corn, or a *Blade of Grass*? — *Something* we may do, in *Subserviency* to the Divine Providence; but, *independently* of That, *Nothing* or worse than Nothing. We have just Strength enough to quicken our Industry; but Weakness enough we must always be conscious of to check our Presumption and mortify our Self-sufficiency.

What St. *Paul* has observed of Preaching the Gospel is in some measure applicable to the Case before us: ^a *One may plant, and another Water*; but, after all, it is God *that* must *give the Increase*. Nay, the Truth is, we are not able to do so much as *This*. We may sow or plant indeed; but ^b *is there any among the Vanities of the Heathen that can cause Rain?* as the *Prophet* speaks; or can we

^a 1 Cor. III. 6. ^b Jer. XIV. 22.

devise any Method to supply the Want of it? No: ^a *Except the LORD bless the Ground, Your Labour is but lost that till it: It is in vain that Ye haste to rise up early, and late take Rest, and eat the Bread of Carefulness; if He* ^b *command not the Clouds from above, and open not the Doors of Heaven. If He do not cause His Sun to shine, and His Rain to fall in their Season; Your own Strength, in the disparaging but very just Representation of the Prophet, ^c is but to sit still.*

It is in order more effectually to *convince*, and more successfully to *remind* us of this useful and important Truth (we may believe) that the Almighty is pleased sometimes to *defeat Your Labours*; to disappoint Your fairest Hopes and most promising Expectations; by first sending, as an *Effect* of Your *Industry*, in cultivating Your Lands, a plentiful Crop; and then, as a *Punishment* of Your *Unmindfulness* of His Providence, by denying You the *Opportunity to eat thereof*. This an Almighty Hand hath various Methods of accomplishing: Either by *Blasting or Mildew*; or by (what the Prophet Joel calls) ^d *His Great Army, the Locust, Caterpillar, Cankerworm or Palmer-Worm*; or (which is more frequent

^a Psal. CXXVII. 1, 3. ^d Joel II. 25.

^b Ibid. LXXVIII. 23.

^c Isai.

in These Countries) by overflowing Floods, by unseasonable, immoderate and lasting Rains. He delights not (we may be sure) in the Miseries or Disappointments of His Creatures as such; nor ^a *does He afflict willingly or grieve the Children of Men.* But when His Creatures forget their Dependence upon Him, it is Time to awaken in them a due Sense of it, by seasonable Chastisements affecting them in the *very Instance* of their Forgetfulness and Ingratitude: To convince them, that where *their Labour* is most of all in their *own Disposal*, the *Success* of it still depends upon *His Good-Pleasure*; and that, however the *Fruits* of the Ground may be called *Theirs*, the *Seasons* for Gathering them are *His*.

An eminent Instance of Unthankfulness for Favours of this Kind we find recorded by *Hosea*, and as eminent a Proof of the Divine Displeasure for it. ^b *She did not know or consider* (says the *Prophet* concerning the People of *Israel*) *that I gave her Corn and Wine and Oil, and multiplied her Silver and Gold.* And what was the Consequence of This? Why, says *GOD*, ^c *I will return and take away my Corn in the Time thereof, and my Wine in its Season; and will recover my Wool and my Flax; and I will destroy her Vines and her Fig-Trees.*

^a Lam. III. 33.^b Hol. II. 8.^c Ibid. 9, 12.

The Truth is, We are all of us ready enough to own, many of us (I fear) to complain, that the *Disappointment* of our Labours is to be ascribed to God. And why should we not as readily allow the *Success* of them to be ascribed to the same great Cause? If we will believe the Holy *Psalmist*, it is the *same* God who ^a *maketh a fruitful Land barren for the Wickedness of them that dwell therein*; and who again, upon the Amendment of its Inhabitants, ^b *turneth the Wilderness into a standing Water, and dry Ground into Water-springs*. And accordingly it is to the same Gracious Being that He addresses the following beautiful Description, with which I shall close this Head. ^c *Thou visitest the Earth and blessest it; Thou makest it very plenteous: The River of God is full of Water; Thou preparest their Corn, for so Thou providest for the Earth: Thou waterest her Furrows; Thou sendest Rain into the little Valleys thereof: Thou makest it soft with the Drops of Rain, and blessest the Increase of it: Thou crownest the Year with Thy Goodness, and Thy Clouds drop Fatness: They shall drop upon the Dwellings of the Wilderness, and the little Hills shall rejoice on every Side: The Folds shall be full of Sheep; the*

^a Psal. CVII. 34.^b Ibid. 35.^c Ibid. LV. 9—13.

Valleys also shall stand so thick with Corn, that They shall laugh and sing!

From what has been said I would hope we are all of us duly sensible, *To whom we are indebted for the Blessings we enjoy, and particularly for Those fruitful Seasons, that Food and Gladness, which may be at any Time vouchsafed to us.* It is Time then that I should proceed to enquire,

II. What *Uses* it may become us to make of the foregoing Reflections, upon This and every like Occasion.

Now These *Uses* may relate to the *Manner* of our *Receiving*, or of our *Enjoying*, or of our *Employing*, the Blessings conferred on us by Providence. — And, I think, it is very obvious to infer from what has occurred to us under the former Head, that we should *Receive* them with due *Thankfulness* to the *bountiful Giver*: — That we should *Enjoy* them with a proper *Cheerfulness* but yet with *Sobriety*: — And, that we should *communicate* a suitable *Proportion* out of our own Abundance to our *Brethren* that may be in *Need*.

I. It will on This and all Occasions highly become us to *express our Thankfulness to the Great Author* for the Blessings we have received.

Gratitude for Benefits received is a Duty so *natural* and *obvious*, that one would imagine it could hardly be necessary to *mention*, much less to *enlarge upon* and *enforce* it. This is a Return for all Favours very strongly suggested by *Nature* itself; and is such as (I dare say) *we* all of us *expect* from Those whom *we* have at any Time obliged. Shall we then refuse to make that Return to our Great *Creator*, the Author and *Giver of every Thing* we enjoy, which we expect from Those of our Fellow-Creatures, on whom we have conferred any *trivial* Favour? *If we being Evil know* what to expect for our inconsiderable Obligations laid upon one another; *how much more* justly may a beneficent and Good God demand the most hearty Acknowledgment from us, who are indebted to Him, not only for the Power of obliging others, but *for Life and Breath and all Things?*

And surely This, as it is a Natural, so is it a very *easy* and *cheap*, Return for the Plenty afforded us. We are not now, as God's People of old were, burthened with *expensive* Observances and *costly* Sacrifices. The Almighty, though He ⁿ *knows all the Fowls upon the Mountains; though all the Beasts of the Forest are His, and the Cattle upon a thousand Hills;*

a Acts XVII. 25.

b Psal. L. 11.

yet He will ^a *take no Bullock out of our House,*
nor He-Goat out of our Fold. And shall we
 not then *freely* ^b *offer unto Him the un-expen-*
sive Return of Thanksgiving; and gratefully
 acknowledge that all we have is from His
 Bounty? ^c *Had so gracious a Benefactor bid*
us do some great Thing, should we not have done
it! how much more then when He saith to us
only, Rejoice and give Thanks!

A Return however this is, which (I fear)
 how natural and easy soever in itself, we are
 often *strangely unmindful* of paying. It has
 frequently been remarked, that of ^d *Ten Le-*
pers, that were *cleansed* by the miraculous
 Operation of our Blessed LORD, *but one re-*
turned to give Glory to GOD. I am afraid the
Proportion too generally holds in common
 Cases. Under the Pressure of Affliction or
 Want *we can cry mightily unto GOD;* and
 perhaps complain of being hardly dealt with,
 if our apprehended Grievances are not *instant-*
ly removed. But when our Prayers are heard,
 and our *Desires even outdone,* are we as much
 moved with a *Sense* of the *Divine Goodness* as
 we were before with the *Feeling* of our *own*
Necessities? Every Man's Conscience must an-
 swer for himself to this Enquiry. Nor is it

^a Psal. L. 9.
 XVII. 12—18.

^b Ibid. 14.

^c 2 King. V. 13.

^d Luk.

an Enquiry of *slight* Importance. The ^a *Hand-writing upon the Wall* was a dreadful Appearance to *Belshazzar*: And what was the *Occasion* of so remarkable a Visitation? Why; *He had profaned the Vessels of the Temple, and had praised the Gods of Silver and of Gold, &c.* and in This Part of his Crimes we may think ourselves no Way concerned. But there is one great *Aggravation* of his Guilt still behind, in which we may do well to consider whether we are not Partakers; for we find the Prophet *Daniel* concluding His solemn Charge against him in these memorable Words,—^b *The GOD in whose Hand thy Breath is, and whose are all thy Ways, hast thou not glorified!*

Hear what a Character God Himself gives of *His own People* by His Prophet *Jeremiah*. ^c *This People hath a revolting and a rebellious Heart; They are revolted and gone.* But what was it that could provoke Almighty God to describe His *peculiar People* in Terms of so much *Reproach* and *Resentment*? The Reason we have in the very next Words; ^d *They say not in their Hearts, "Let us now fear the "LORD our GOD that giveth Rain, both the "former and the latter Rain in His Season: "He reserveth unto us the appointed Weeks of*

^a Dan. V. 5, &c. ^b Ibid. 23. ^c Jer. V. 23. ^d Ibid. 24.
"the

“*the Harvest.*” The Almighty we see looks upon our *Neglect* to pay Him our Tribute of Praise and Thanksgiving as a *Revolt* from our Allegiance ; and interprets our very *Silence* in this Case as an Instance of *Treason* and Rebellion against Himself. But

2. We are to *partake of the Plenty*, conferred on us by Providence, *with Chearfulness*, and at the same Time *with Sobriety*.

I say, *with Chearfulness*. For we are not to imagine that the bountiful Hand of Providence *first spreads Plenty* before us, and *then debars* us the Enjoyment of it by a severe *Interdict*. The *Apostle St. Paul* in his beautiful Speech to the People of *Lystra*, represents it as an Instance of God's *Goodness*, that by *“sending Rain and fruitful Seasons He fills our Hearts with Food and Gladness:* And He elsewhere informs us, that *“every Creature of God is Good, and Nothing to be refused if it be received with Thanksgiving.* The Truth is, a *cheerful Enjoyment* of the Gifts of Heaven is a *Kind of Thanksgiving* for them ; nor can our Hearts well be duly grateful for the Things, in which we have no Degree of Comfort or Complacence. Those Persons do *great Injury* to our Holy Religion, who would represent it as a *gloomy melancholy Thing* : The

^a Acts IV. 17.

^b 1 Tim. IV. 4.

Consciousness of our being continually under the Divine Superintendence and Protection is a perpetual Fund for *true Joy* and *innocent Chearfulness*.

Accordingly we find the *Royal Preacher King Solomon*, who was not only a *careful Observer* of Men and Things, but who had by the *special Favour* of Heaven a *wise and understanding Heart*, more than once recommending such a comfortable Enjoyment of its good Things as this Life would afford, in Opposition to a sordid and penurious Way of Living: *a For a Man to enjoy the Good of all his Labours*, He tells us expressly, *is the Gift of God*, In another Place He represents it as a *b sore Evil under the Sun*, and yet such an Evil as was common among Men; *that a Man to whom GOD hath given Riches, and Wealth, and Honour, so that he wanteth nothing of all that his Heart desireth; and yet GOD giveth him not Power to eat thereof. This (says He) is Vanity, and it is an evil Disease!*

Authorities are needless in a Case so plain. For a Man to have a plentiful Allotment of the *Accommodations* of Life, and yet to make *no Use* of them for that Purpose! To undergo the unavoidable Toil and Vexation of a

^a Eccl. V. 18, 19.

^b Ibid. VI. 1, 2.

Passage through this World; and at the same Time *voluntarily* to debar himself of those innocent Refreshments which offer themselves to him *by the Way*! In the *midst of Affluence* to render himself as *necessitous* as *Those that want Bread*, though not so pitiable! *This surely is Vanity, and it is an evil Disease!*

Let me, however, by no Means here be misunderstood. Great *Caution* must be used in this Particular; lest by *avoiding one Extreme* we *fall into another*, and that such an one as is at least *equally dangerous*. Instead of *using Liberty for an Occasion to the Flesh*, we must *qualify* our Enjoyments with Moderation, our *Cheerfulness* with *Sobriety*. Our Pleasures must not exceed the Bounds prescribed by Reason and Religion. Though we may gratify the *innocent* Desires of our Nature, we must beware of *making Provision for the Flesh, to fulfil the Lusts thereof*. Far be it from any one among us to *turn the Grace of God into Lasciviousness*, or so far to misapply the Bounty of Heaven, as to render it an Occasion or Encouragement to his own Intemperance, and Brutality: Like the *certain Rich Man* in one of our LORD's *Parables*, whose *Ground*, having *brought forth plentifully*, He

presently said to his Soul, Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years : Take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But You will recollect what GOD said unto him the same Night ; This Night shall Thy Soul be required of Thee : Then whose shall Those Things be which Thou hast provided ! Whilst, therefore, we ^a joy with the Joy of Harvest, we must remember that we are Men and Christians ; and not be so wholly taken up with the Thoughts of our own Abundance as to forget, from whom we receive, and in whose Presence we enjoy it. The Joy, which our Holy Religion allows, is not a noisy, and excessive or a riotous Mirth ; but a sober, chaste, temperate Joy ; a Joy conducted under the Fear of GOD, and terminating (as ^b all our Actions should do) in His Glory.

We should be careful also to regulate our Pleasures with regard to the Seasons as well as the Degrees of them ; and not suffer our, otherwise innocent, Gratifications to interfere, either with a regular Discharge of the Offices of Life, or with a due Observance of the Divine Ordinances. ^c Every Thing is beautiful in its Time : Cheerful Diversions may be innocent and proper on suitable Occasions ; and friendly Visits among Neighbours or Relations

^a Isai. IX. 3.^b 1 Cor. X. 31.^c Eccl. III. 11.

will often be useful, nay commendable, Means of preserving and promoting *Good-Will amongst Men*. — But should we allow our Diversions or our Visits to detain us when the *Duties* of our *Calling*, and especially when the *Worship of our Maker*, demand our Attendance: *This* would be employing the Blessings of God in an Use quite contrary to that for which they were given us; and we may justly fear, that such Pleasures must be *dearly paid* for, either in bitter Repentance and Remorse here, or in something far more dreadful hereafter! — But Moderation, in our Enjoyment of Good Things afforded us, is the more necessary, because

3. We are on such Occasions of Plenty to communicate a due Proportion out of our Abundance for the Relief of our Brethren that are in Need.

There is a very remarkable Precept given to the *Jews*, and repeated more than once in the Law of *Moses*. ^a *When Ye reap the Harvest of Your Land, thou shalt not wholly reap the Corners of thy Field, neither shalt thou gather the Gleanings of thy Harvest: And thou shalt not glean thy Vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every Grape of thy Vineyard: Thou shalt leave them for the Poor and the Stranger: I*

^a Lev. XIX. 9, 10. — XXIII. 22. Deut. XXIV. 19, 20, 21.

am the LORD Your GOD. Which *last* Words are not added at all *Adventures*, but with great Propriety and *Significancy*: They contain a very *powerful Argument* for performing the Duty enjoined; and a *beautiful Anticipation* of such Objections or Evasions as the *Jews* might perhaps be but too ready to make use of against it. — *I am the LORD Your GOD*: Your Plenty is all from *my Bounty*; and I have therefore a Right to demand what *Reserves* I please out of it. — And again, *I am the LORD Your GOD*. Fear not therefore that Your Liberality shall ever occasion *Want* to Yourself: The Command is *Mine*; and You may *trust Me* with the *Consequences* of a chearful Compliance with it.

And if such Provision was made for the Relief of the Poor under the *Mosaick Dispensation*; shall *We* suffer our distressed Brethren to go unprovided for? *We*, who are ^a *Partakers of a better Covenant, established upon better Promises*? Shall we ^b *destroy Him* for Want of Meat, for whom CHRIST died? What a Reproach would it be to us, what a Reflection on our Holy Profession, should there in these plenteous Years, be found any among us in Want of Bread!

^a Heb. VIII. 6.

^b Rom. XIV. 15.

The Truth is, They whose ^a *Lot is fallen to them in a fair Ground, and who have a goodly Heritage*, are rather *Stewards* than *Proprietors* of the *Plenty* afforded them. The Almighty by ^b *sending gracious Rain upon His Inheritance*, does of His great *Goodness* provide for the *Poor*; and makes the *Rich* the *Dispensers* of His *Bounty* towards them. ^c *The Rich and the Poor*, in this respect also, *meet together*; the *LORD is the Maker of them All*. — He is the *Maker* of them, not only as they are *Men*, but as they are *Rich and Poor*. He has placed them in these different *Situations* for many wise and gracious *Purposes*; and for *This* among others, that the one might have the *Pleasure* of receiving, and the other the much higher *Satisfaction* of giving *Relief*: That (in this Sense also) ^d *He that soweth and he that reapeth might rejoice together*.

Under the Name of *Liberality* to the necessitous I would be far from recommending *Profuseness* to all who would pass themselves upon us for such. You will carefully distinguish the *modest* and *helpless* whom You know to be fit *Objects* of *Compassion*, from the *lazy and clamorous*, of whom You know Nothing but their *Importunity*. Neither Reason nor

^a Psa. XVI. 6. ^b Ibid. LXVIII. 9, 10. ^c Prov. XXII. 2.

^d Joh. IV. 36.

Religion require that They who *can* but *will not work* should *eat* the Fruit of the Labour of their industrious Neighbours. *They that are such* deserve *Correction* rather than *Relief*: And far be it from me to plead for any such Misapplication of Your Bounty, as the Throwing it away upon them would be! But then, on the other Hand, I must entreat You likewise, not to let Your Aversion to the idle and impudent *Vagrant* ever make You *turn away Your Faces from a Poor Man*, or stop Your Ears to the Cries of the *humble Suppliant*. Charity and Beneficence to such, under *due Regulations*, is at once one of the *noblest Uses* of the Blessings of Providence, and is accepted by God as one of the *propereſt Returns* we can make *for them*. A *Verbal Acknowledgment* is certainly *right* and our bounden Duty, *as far as it goes*. But then it is against the common Sense of Mankind to think of being *fully grateful* by entertaining our Benefactor only with *fair Speeches* and bare Professions of our Obligations to Him. Thus far the most fordid and selfish will allow themselves to go. But an Heart *warmed* with *real* Sentiments of Gratitude will by no means content itself with *a offering to the LORD that only which costs him Nothing*. — On the other

Hand, to think of *requiting* GOD in any *proper* Sense by a Return of real Benefits to Him, would be equally irrational. All the Services we can pay Him can make *no Addition* to His compleat Blessedness. * *What Reward* then shall we give unto the LORD for all the Benefits He hath done, for all the Plenty He hath vouchsafed, unto us? Why; He Himself has prescribed the Way to us. ^b *Our Goods are Nothing to Him*, it is true. But He has devolved His Right to a due Proportion out of them upon our *necessitous Brethren*: He hath deputed *them* to receive these Evidences or Expressions of our Gratitude to Him: And for our Encouragement has told us, that whatever Relief or Comfort we shall administer to them *for His Sake*, He will accept as an Instance of our Love to *Himself*: According to that memorable Declaration of Solomon. — “^c *He that hath pity on the Poor, lendeth unto the LORD;*” and that still more memorable Declaration of a Greater than Solomon, ^d *Inasmuch as Ye have done it* (speaking of those Acts of Kindness and Compassion He had before mentioned) *inasmuch as Ye have done it to one of the least of these my Brethren, Ye have done it unto Me.*

a Psal. CXVI. 12.

b Ibid. XVI. 2.

c Prov. XIX. 17.

d Matt. XXV. 40.

Can Words express a *stronger* Incitement to what was, *before*, our *Reasonable Service*! ^a *Who* bath this *World's Goods*, and seeth his *Brother have Need*, and shutteth up his *Bowels of Compassion from him*, — how dwelleth the *Love of GOD in him*! Even Humanity itself, where it is left in any Degree, will scarce suffer us to see a distressed Object without reaching forth all the Relief in our Power: And shall not *the Love of CHRIST* constrain us to extend our Beneficence to Those whom He has constituted *His Receivers*? Methinks we should rather *seek out* for proper Objects of our Charity, than *turn away on the other Side* when such offer themselves to us; bringing along with them so endearing a Recommendation from our *Saviour Himself*; *who, though He was Rich*, Rich in an higher Sense than any created Being can be, ^b *yet for our Sakes became Poor*, that we, *through His Poverty might be Rich*.

To conclude. If any here present be blessed with an abundant Portion of the Good Things of this World; (which, I trust, may be the Case of *many* that hear me this Day;) if in particular ^c *the Ground of any Man lately brought forth plentifully*: Remember, to whose Bounty You stand indebted for *every Good*

^a 1 Joh. III. 17.^b 2 Cor. VIII. 9.^c Luk. XII. 16.

Gift;

Gifts; who it is that hath given *You Rain from Heaven and fruitful Seasons*; filling *Your Hearts with Food and Gladness*. And remember too, that the same Affluence and Plenty which *ought* to remind us of the Goodness of our Creator, and of the Wants of our Fellow-Creatures, is but too fatally *apt* to render us unmindful of Both. The Transition is easy from being *Full* to saying, “^a *Who is the LORD?*” And They who ^b *anoint themselves with the chief Ointments*, are but rarely found to be much *grieved for the Afflictions of Joseph*. — ^c *When therefore we have eaten and are full, then more especially let us beware that we forget not the LORD our GOD*: Because *then* we shall be most in Danger of forgetting Him; and our Forgetfulness of Him will *then* be attended with the highest Aggravation, the foulest Ingratitude. ^d *In all our Ways let us acknowledge GOD*; and if ^e *in the Day of Prosperity we rejoice* (as surely with Innocence we may) let us however ^f *rejoice unto Him with Reverence*. By being *ready to distribute, willing to communicate*, let us at once derive His Blessing on our *present Abundance*, and ^g *lay up to ourselves a good*

^a Prov. XXX. 9. ^b Amos VI. 6. ^c Deut. VIII. 10, 11.
^d Prov. III. 6. ^e Eccl. VII. 14. ^f Psal. II. 11. ^g 1 Tim. VI. 18, 19.

Foundation against the Time to come. — Thus shall we ^a use This World as not abusing it: Our Plenty will not be a Snare, but a Blessing, to us: Till, from an innocent Enjoyment of the Bounties of Providence here, we shall be admitted to the Everlasting Glories of His Prefence hereafter.

To which happy State GOD of His infinite Mercy bring us all, through the Merits of our Saviour JESUS CHRIST!

a 1 Cor. VII. 31.

S E R M O N XIV.

PROVERBS III. 5, 6.

*Trust in the LORD with all Thine Heart,
and lean not unto Thine own Under-
standing. In all Thy Ways acknow-
ledge HIM, and He shall direct Thy
Paths.*

THERE are no Sentiments which the inspired Writers seem more solicitous to encourage in the Mind of Man, than Those of an habitual *Trust* in the Providence of GOD, expressed, on all proper Occasions, in suitable *Acknowledgments*, or Acts of Devotion towards Him. And, considering the indigent Condition of our Nature, and the Shortness of our Views of Things, there cannot, surely, be a Privilege more to be desired by us, than That of a ready Access to a Being of infinite Wisdom, Power, and Goodness, for *the Direc-*

tion of our Paths, and the Supply of all our Wants.

And yet, I fear, there is not any Privilege more frequently slighted by us, than *This*. Weak and short-sighted as we are, we affect to be independent on any *superiour* Aid or Information. In the eager Prosecution of our various Schemes, we neglect to apply to *Him*, who alone can enable us to conduct them with Success or Safety: And, if He is pleased, notwithstanding, to permit them for a while to prosper, we begin to applaud our own Fore-sight and Activity; ^a*sacrificing* (as the *Prophet* speaks) *to our Net, and burning Incense to our Drag*; as if *by them, and them only, our Portion were fat, and our Meat plenteous*. The Pains we take in Pursuit of Knowledge, being exerted in the like self-sufficient Manner, our Attainments therein are apt to be considered as *solely* owing to our own unwearyed Diligence or uncommon Penetration; and the *Glory* thence arising, after being greatly magnified by our vain Imaginations, is of course made to *terminate singly* in Ourselves. — A Proceeding, however, This is, not only undutiful and injurious to Almighty God, but highly prejudicial to our own real Interest. For, after all, ^b*the LORD is King, be we ne-*

^a Hab. I. 16.

^b Psal. XCIX. 1.

ver so impatient or unmindful of His Dominion. He, who first made this World, will also govern it: He will prosper our Undertakings or defeat our Labours just as He sees good. And, if He is at any Time pleased to allow That Success to our Projects or our Studies, which we neglect to ask of Him; He always can, and generally doth, sooner or later, shew, that such Success was far enough from being ordained to our lasting Benefit. Where ^a the Blessing of our LORD maketh Rich, He addeth no Sorrow with it. But, without His Blessing, ^b even in much Wisdom is much Grief; and he that increaseth Knowledge, increaseth Sorrow.

With a View to This prevailing but fatal Error in the Conduct of human Life, and in Order to prevent (as far as may be) the Younger Part of my Hearers especially from falling into it; I have made Choice of the Words of my *Text*, and shall endeavour, as usefully as I can, to explain and enforce the Advice contained in Them. — *Trust in the LORD with all Thine Heart, and lean not unto Thine own Understanding. In all Thy Ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct Thy Paths.*

They are the Words of the Wise King Solomon, affectionately admonishing his Son or

^a Prov. X. 22.

^b Eccl. I. 18.

Disciple. And, as He had, *Himself*, at his Entrance upon publick Life, *asked* and obtained of GOD ^a *an Understanding Heart* to conduct him with Honour through it; we may fairly suppose Him to be thus recommending the same devout Practise to the Person, whom He is here instructing. — “ *My*
 “ *Son*, Thou art just Going forth into a World,
 “ full of Perplexities and Temptations; which
 “ *easily beset* the Young and Unexperienced;
 “ and by which the self-conceited and self-
 “ willed are ever most in Danger of being en-
 “ tangled to their Ruin. But, *if* Any of These
 “ should *entice Thee*, *consent Thou not* to be of
 “ their Number. Instead of confidently *lean-*
 “ *ing unto Thine own Understanding*, be Thy
 “ *Trust* reposed on Him, *whose Understanding*
 “ *is infinite*. To Him let Thy Recourse be in
 “ every Exigency: And, *if* in particular ^b *Thou*
 “ *lackest Wisdom*, *Ask of Him*. If in all Thy
 “ *Ways* Thou shalt thus *acknowledge Him*, He
 “ *will not fail to direct Thy Paths*: He shall
 “ make Thy Passage through Life *plain before*
 “ *Thee*: He shall conduct Thee safely, if not
 “ to the Accomplishment of Thy Wishes, yet
 “ to the Attainment of Something still more
 “ for Thy real Advantage.—*Trust in the LORD*
 “ *with all Thine Heart, and lean not unto Thine*

a 1 Kin. III, 9, &c.

b Jam. I. 5.

“own Understanding. In all thy Ways acknowledge HIM, and He shall direct Thy Paths.”

We have in the Words, thus considered, an Encouragement to *Trust* in GOD and to make our *Applications* to Him: An Encouragement of great Moment through the *whole Course* of Life, but especially in those *early Stages* of it, on the Regulation whereof the Happiness of the remaining ones will always greatly depend. However, lest so comfortable an Invitation, whilst it guards against the fatal Extreme of *Self-sufficiency* and *Impiety*, should be misapplied to the scarce less pernicious Purposes of *Slothfulness* or *Enthusiasm*; it may be proper,

I. To explain the *Import of the Advice* here given, and to shew *what is implied in it*.

II. To illustrate the *Propriety* of it, in Reference to the *End* here proposed. And then,

III. To subjoin a *Reflection* or two, suited to the Subject, *by Way of Conclusion* from the Whole.

I. As to the *Import* of the Advice itself: To *Trust in GOD*, in Opposition to *Leaning unto our own Understandings*, must be; instead of confiding solely or principally in our own
Wisdom

Wisdom or Abilities, to put ourselves under the Direction of His Laws and the Guardianship of His Providence : As again, by *Acknowledging Him in all our Ways* must (I conceive) be meant, *Setting Him always before us*, and *Recognizing* our perpetual Dependence upon Him by Those *Acts* of Piety, the Refusal or continued Neglect of which would amount to a *Denial* of Him.

And, by every such Act we cannot understand less than a *deliberate Approach* of the Heart to GOD : Under an *immediate Recollection* of His intimate Presence with us, and supreme Disposal of every Thing that can in any Way affect us : With a *filial Reliance* upon His Willingness to hear our Petitions, as well as His Power to give us what we desire of Him : And, in us *Christians* particularly, with a *lively Faith* in His Promises by CHRIST JESUS : *" In whose Name* we are directed to *Ask whatsoever* we stand in Need of ; and *^b in whom* alone, as sinful Creatures, *we have Boldness and Access with Confidence by the Faith of Him.*

Let me add, in reference to the *Measure* of our Trust in GOD, and the *Nature* of our Applications to Him ; that *These*, being grounded upon *His Perfections* and *our Wants*, should

^a Joh. XVI. 23.

^b Eph. III. 12.

always be regulated by a due Consideration of *Both*. Were we to take a View of God's Power and Goodness *separately* from His other Attributes, or of our own Abilities *only* as they are *in themselves*: We could hardly make our Addresses under too strong an Assurance in the *Former*, or too entire a Disregard of the *Latter*. But, when we consider God as wise, and just, and holy, as well as powerful and gracious; and ourselves as feeble and indigent, nay *unable to think or do any Thing as of ourselves*, yet furnished with Powers capable of Enlargement with such Help as is always ready, and by proper Exertion applicable to many excellent Purposes: We see the Impropriety of expecting from God any such Assistance, as it can be neither fit for Him to give, nor for us to receive. If *our own Understandings* may not be *wholly relied upon*, yet neither must they be wholly neglected. Our Faculties in general are *the Gift of God*; and must therefore not only be thankfully received but diligently employed and improved (as far as we *can* improve them) as *Talents* for which we are accountable to *Him*.

But to be a little more particular. — The Temper and Practice now under Consideration must be founded in or accompanied and compleated by—A *lowly Sense* of our own Natural

tural Insufficiency : — A *devout Application* to Him, who alone can supply our Defects : — A *careful Use* of such Means as He has put within our Power : — A *steady Resolution* to reject all Expedients disagreeable to His Will : — And a *dutiful Acquiescence* in His Dispensations ; alike prepared to adore His Wisdom in the Delay or the Denial of our Requests, as to acknowledge His Bounty in the more direct Grant of them.

The *First* Requisite just mentioned is a Diffidence of ourselves, or a Consciousness of our Want of some superiour Guidance. *He, that cometh unto GOD as a Petitioner for Wisdom, must previously be convinced, that ^a it is not in Man to direct his Steps :* That, in what relates to future Advantages in Life, we see but a very little Way before us, often disappointed where most sanguine, and sometimes happy where most disappointed : That in Matters of human Science, *^b hardly do we guess aright at the Things that are on the Earth, and with all our Labour can penetrate little farther than the Outside of Things most within our Cognizance :* That, in reference to our Innocence, *^c when we think we stand firmest and most secure, we are especially concerned*

a Jer. X. 23.

b Wisd. IX. 16.

c 1 Cor. X. 12.

to take Heed lest we fall: That as to ^a Things in Heaven, the Nature and Counsels of GOD, and the transcendent Objects of an invisible World; These are too far removed from our Sphere to be searched out or known by us, except He Himself send Wisdom from above: That, although ^b GOD hath by His Spirit revealed to us many Things, which Eye had not seen before; yet, even ^c now, we can see them only as through a Glass darkly: And, that there are still in the Accounts of them ^d some Things hard to be understood, which we may by our Vanity and Presumption, without the Assistance of the same Spirit, wrest to our own Destruction. — They, who ^e think of themselves more highly than They ought to think, are but ill prepared to Trust in the LORD with all their Hearts; and instead of duly acknowledging Him in all their Ways, will be ready to ask — “ ‘ What Profit shall we have, if we Pray unto Him ? ”

On the other Hand, the humble-minded Man, conscious of his own Inability, will look up to Him, from whom cometh his Help. Notwithstanding the great Disorder introduced into our Constitution, we still feel something in Acts of Piety wonderfully adapted to the Spi-

^a Wisd. IX. 16, 17. ^b 1 Cor. II. 9, 10. ^c Ibid. XIII. 12.
^d 2 Pet. III. 16. ^e Rom. XII. 3. ^f Job XXI. 15.

ritual Part of it: Which, when neither neglected in the Season for its early Cultivation, nor afterwards incumbered with the Cares of This World, nor immersed in Sensual Indulgences, nor estranged by sinful Habits, almost naturally *returns* in devout Aspirations to God *who gave it*. Accordingly, the Good Man, whatever his Situation or Circumstances, whatever his Occupation or Profession, may be, will daily recommend himself and all his Concerns to the Divine Blessing. Even the *Artificer* and the *Husbandman*, among other Methods of acquiring Skill, and ensuring Success, in their respective Employments, will never forget, that *“This also cometh of the LORD of Hosts, who is wonderful in Counsel, and excellent in Working.* The prudent *Statesman*, when looking abroad for powerful Allies, will not neglect *His* Friendship, ^b *with whom* emphatically *is Strength and Wisdom; in whose Hand are the Hearts of Men; and who can, when He sees fit, lead the ablest Counsellors away spoiled.* In the Pursuit of useful Learning, the well-disposed *Student* will beg of God to *“give him Wisdom that sitteth by His Throne; to enlighten his Understanding, and to bless his Researches; to guard him against the Delusions of vain Philosophy, and*

a *Isai.* XXVIII. 29. b *Job* XII. 16, 17. c *Wisd.* IX. 4.
Those

Those Snares into which even *Knowledge* is apt to betray the *carnal* Mind. Above all, the devout *Christian* will constantly implore the Assistance of *That Spirit*, who dictated the sacred Writings; who alone is able so ^a to open his Understanding as that he may understand the Scriptures; so to ^b touch his Heart as that he may seriously attend to, and effectually embrace, *Those Things that are spoken in them.*

Still however, such Addresses to Heaven must be accompanied by the diligent Use of Those other Means that may be in our Power. In vain (for instance) shall we, with the pious *Psalmist*, beseech God to ^c open our Eyes that we may see the wonderful Things of His Law, unless we can say with him too, “^d all the Day long is my Study in it.” If, in the sublime Language of the Evangelical Prophet, we call upon ^e the Heavens to drop down from above, and upon the Skies to pour down Righteousness; if we expect the Earth to open and bring forth Salvation; we ourselves must, like wise Husbandmen, prepare the ^f Ground by breaking the Clods and making plain the Face thereof; we must cast in the principal Wheat and the appointed Barley and the Rye into their

^a Luk. XXIV. 45. ^b Acts XVI. 14. ^c Psal. CXIX. 18.
^d Ibid. 97. ^e Isai. XLV. 8. ^f Ibid. XXVIII. 24, 25.

Places ; or (in the Words of *Hosea*) we must ^a *break up our Fallow-ground, and sow to ourselves in Righteousness*, if ever we hope to reap in Mercy. Even the *Apostles*, to whom our LORD's well-known Admonition against ^b *Thoughtfulness* was eminently, if not peculiarly, addressed, had the *Wisdom of the Serpent*, in Conjunction with the *Harmlessness of the Dove*, recommended to them by the same Authority ; and were so far from being denied the Use of human Precaution, as to be directed *when persecuted in one City to flee into another*. St. Paul, in his Instructions to *Timothy*, recommends ^c *salutary Remedies* for the *Infirmities* of his Body, as well as ^d *attentive Reading* for the *Profiting* of his Mind. And though we find him, in exhorting his ^e *Philippian Converts to Prayer*, advising them to be careful for Nothing ; yet, that He disapproved not of every Kind or Degree of even Worldly Carefulness, may be learnt from almost the next Words, where he mentions with Commendation their *Care* for *His Support* ; towards which They could hardly have sent once and again without some Care taken for *their own* : And, as to their *Spiritual Concerns* ; so far is He from discharging them of

a Hof. X. 12.

b Matt. X. 16, 19, 23.

c 1 Tim. V. 23.

d Ibid. IV. 13.

e Phil. IV. 10, 14, 16.

all Thoughtfulness on account of God's *Free Grace working in them*, that He presses ^a *That* very Consideration as an Argument, why They should *work out their own Salvation*, not only with Care and Diligence, but *with Fear and Trembling*. The Truth is, We are to ^b *cast all our Care of Events upon God*; but not so as to become careless of the Means, or at all the less *sober and Vigilant* ourselves. To neglect our own Part in any Undertaking, on a Presumption that God's Providence will accomplish the Whole for us, were to suppose Him a Patron of Sloth, not a Rewarder of Industry: And whoever *thus* trusts in God will be sure to *affront* Him.

But farther: If to depend upon God's Favour whilst we are Doing *Nothing* for ourselves cannot but be displeasing to Him, how much more provoking would it be to hope for His Blessing upon the *Violation* of His *Laws*! Indeed so glaring an Absurdity, so shocking an Impiety, This must be, that one would think it hardly possible to be fallen into, or necessary to be guarded against; had *We not heard with our Ears*, what wild Disorders have in our own Days been introduced into the Publick Worship of Almighty God, by Men pretending all the while to a pecu-

^a Phil. II. 12, 13. ^b 1 Pet. V. 7, 8.

liar Intimacy with Him ; or *had not our Fathers told us*, how not only Falsehood and Treachery, but Sacrilege and Parricide, were *in the Times before them* recommended to the Favour of Heaven under all the Formalities of Prayer and Fasting. But, to such a Dependence on GOD as This His holy Word gives no Encouragement, much to the contrary. ^a *Trust in the LORD, and be Doing Good*, says the *Psalmist* : And *Solomon*, after the Invitation in my *Text* to the same Religious Confidence, presently adds, “^b *Fear the LORD, and depart from Evil.*” — How necessary soever it may appear, in the Accounts of both Philosophy and Theology, that the *First Cause* should *concur* with *Second Causes* in all their Operations ; yet, if any Thing *may be known* of GOD from Either, it is This, ^c *That He is of purer Eyes than to look on Iniquity* with any Degree of Approbation. When, therefore, He thinks fit (as for wise Reasons He often may think fit) to suffer irregular and even unjust Measures to take Place, and *so far* to *co-operate* with the Authors of them ; we must by no Means suppose Him to *favour* the one or the other. Such Proceedings can never be well-pleasing to a GOD of Order, or a Righteous Judge of all the Earth. And, should we

a Psal. XXXVII. 3.

b Prov. III. 7.

c Hab. I. 13.

to the Folly of partaking in them, add the Impiety of imploring His Blessing upon them; we should not only *Fight against* GOD, but attempt to engage Him to Fight against Himself.

Once more: The Temper recommended in my Text implies not only a firm Reliance on GOD's Providence *at the Time* of presenting our Addresses to Him, but an undeviating Acquiescence in His Disposal *afterwards*; far from desponding upon every Disappointment, or, upon every Delay of a favourable Answer, striking out of the straight Road of Duty into any crooked Paths. When King ^a *Saul* in his Perplexity found he could obtain no Satisfaction from any of GOD's usual Methods of Communication with His then favourite People; *either by Dreams, or by Urim, or by Prophets*; the Sacred History informs us, how most unhappily, as well as inconsistently, he had Recourse to That very Method of Inquiry, which himself had before justly condemned and prosecuted with Severity. Not so *the Man after GOD's own Heart*. He had His Distresses and Dejections of Mind, like other Men; under which we find him more than once crying out, "^b *Why art Thou cast down,*

^a 1 Sam. XXVIII. 6, &c.
XXVII, LXXI, &c.

^b Psal. XLII, XLIII. and

“ *O my Soul, and why art Thou disquieted with-
 “ in me !”* But did He utterly faint, or fly to
 any unwarrantable Expedients? No: ^a His *sure*
Trust was in the *Goodness* of GOD; and, hav-
 ing often experienced the Sufficiency of *That*
Support, He was always willing to *Tarry the*
LORD’s Leisure for a happy Deliverance out of
 his Troubles, and the seasonable Accomplish-
 ment of all his Desires. There is Something,
 if possible, yet more glorious in the memora-
 ble Declaration of the Prophet *Habakkuk*.
^b *Although the Fig-tree shall not blossom, nei-
 ther shall Fruit be in the Vine; though the La-
 bour of the Olive shall fail, and the Field shall*
yield no Meat; though the Flock shall be cut off
from the Fold, and there shall be no Herd in the
Stall: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will
joy in the GOD of my Salvation! A Pitch of
 Resignation This, devoutly to be aspired to,
 though with Difficulty to be attained, by eve-
 ry good Man under the like Trials. Nay,
 should Any of us find Cause to complain in
 the Words of Holy *Job*, “ ^c *Behold, I go for-*
ward, but He is not there; and backward,
but I cannot perceive Him: On the Left-
Hand, where He doth work, but I cannot be-
hold Him; He hideth Himself on the Right-

^a See partic. 1 Sam. Chap. XXIV and XXVI, &c. ^b Hab.
 III. 17, 18. ^c Job XXIII. 8, 9.

“*Hand, that I cannot see Him:*” Still we should be ready to say, after the same Pattern, “*Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him!*”

Upon the whole: We must so trust in God as to use our own sincere Endeavours: So endeavour as neither to neglect God’s Assistance, nor to forfeit His Favour. Then shall either the Thing we wish for, or Something still better, *in due Season*, be given us. For *every one, that thus asketh, receiveth; and he, that thus seeketh, findeth; and to him, that thus knocketh, there shall be an Opening.* — Which leads me to consider,

II. *The Propriety of Trusting in God, and acknowledging Him as already explained, in Order to obtain Direction to our Paths and Success to our Undertakings.*

Now the Propriety of Applying to *Another* for Direction or Help in any Instance evidently presupposes an *Insufficiency* in the *Person* himself *so applying*: A *Sufficiency*, in the *Person applied to*: And reasonable *Encouragement* from the Latter, that He will be *ready* to give all necessary Assistance upon proper Application made to Him. And, I hope, many Words need not be used to shew the Propriety of the

^a Job XIII. 15.

^b Matt. VII. 8.

Practice hitherto explained, from each of the Considerations here suggested.

That a *Consciousness* of our own Insufficiency is requisite previously to our Addresses to Heaven, has already been observed. And, surely, every Thing we feel within us, every Thing we see without us, must contribute to imprint in our Minds this mortifying, but useful, Sense of our own Weakness. For, what indeed is it, which by any Sagacity or Efforts merely our own we are able to discover, to contrive, or to execute? With regard even to our Secular Affairs; we cannot foresee the smallest of Those commonly called *Accidents*, upon which the Success often principally depends. Neither can we, without Permission at least, direct any of Those *Instruments*, that seem to be most under our Direction, towards the End we propose; nor, if we *could* go thus far, are we able to ensure That *Blessing*, without which the Acquisition itself can *profit us Nothing*.

But, ^a *if we are weak, GOD is strong; yea His Strength is made perfect in our Weakness: And though* ^b *without Him we can Do Nothing, yet* ^c *through Him we may Do all Things.* His Wisdom is infinite, His Power irresistible, and His Goodness equal to Both. He knows our Wants; and, numerous as they

^a 2 Cor. XII. 9.

^b Joh. XV. 5.

^c Phil. IV. 13.

are, He can abundantly supply them. He is emphatically ^a *a God of Knowledge*. He sees, at one comprehensive View, not only Those Consequences of Things and Actions, about which, as having some visible *Connection*, Men of Sagacity may form probable Guesses; but also such *remote* Events, as to our Apprehensions seem most *casual*. Nay, as ^b *He understandeth our Thoughts afar off*, the contingent Effects of our *free* Choice are not hidden from His View. And, surely, *Knowledge so wonderful and excellent* must render Him, who is essentially possessed of it, infinitely more capable of directing us in all Cases, than we Ourselves, or the most penetrating of our Fellow-creatures; who are utterly unqualified, at least with any Certainty, to *shew us Things to come*.

“True,” says the refining Sceptick, willing to *cast off Fear*, though under the Pretence of only *restraining Prayer, before GOD*: “The
 “supreme Being knows every Thing, and can,
 “therefore, need none of our *Informations*:
 “Nay, He certainly *will Do* what is *Right*
 “upon the Whole, without any *Incitement* or
 “Application from us. Whereas, to suppose,
 “that our Prayers could induce Him, in any
 “given Case, to act *otherwise* towards us,

^a 1 Sam. II. 3.^b Psal. CXXXIX. 2.^c Job XV. 4.

“than He would *of Himself* choose to act,
 “were to suppose, that our Performances or
 “our Omissions could *alter* His Purposes, and
 “even *subject* His Measures to our’s. Or,
 “however after all; how shall we *know*,
 “when, or in what Instances, He regards
 “our Addresses; or whether our Affairs are
 “in reality bettered, or even at all affected,
 “by them?”

The Answer to all This brings us to consider, What *Encouragement* we have to believe, that, as God is always *able*, so He will, upon our Application to Him, be *ready*, to supply our Wants. Let me only first observe, upon how *fallacious*, as well as presumptuous, a Representation of This Matter the above-mentioned Exceptions or Queries proceed. Even under the *Light of Nature* (if indeed *we* can form any *adequate* Notion concerning it) Prayers, I presume, were offered to God with a Design *not* to *inform* Him of Men’s Wants, but to *acknowledge* Their *Dependence* on His Bounty; *not* to work any *Change* in His Purposes, but to render the Supplicants more *proper Objects* of His Favour. An All-perfect Being can need no Importunity to induce Him to Do what is Right. Yet a *wise* Governour of *Moral Agents* may judge it right and reasonable to grant many Things to
 Those

Those among them, who devoutly apply to Him, which it might be neither right nor reasonable to confer on such others, as are *a too Proud to care for His Help, or even to have Him in all their Thoughts.*

But, in whatever Light the Case of frail Mortals upon Earth, invoking the transcendent Majesty of Heaven, might have appeared to our *unassisted* Speculations; the *Discoveries*, which God hath made to us of *His Will* and *our Duty*, have happily cleared up *This* among many important Questions. The same God, who is the supreme Dispenser of all Blessings, must have an unquestionable Right to bestow *His own* Gifts on His own Conditions: And He hath been pleased, wisely and graciously, to declare our *Asking them of Him* one of the principal Conditions, on which we must expect to obtain them. I say, *wisely and graciously*: For, as it is of the utmost Importance to our Innocence and our Happiness, that we should be habitually sensible of our continual Dependence on Him; so Nothing contributes more towards preserving such a Sense always fresh in our Mind, than constant Applications to Him. And accordingly, the *Examples* and *Declarations*, that occur in His holy Word, in favour of such Applications,

a Psal. X. 4.

are too numerous to be *all* here produced, and, I trust, also are so well known, that I need not detain You with *any distinct Recital* of them.

And *here*, indeed, it is, that *We Christians* may most safely ground our Hopes in a Performance, from which (if we should at all have thought of it) an awful Apprehension of God's Perfections and of our own Unworthiness might *otherwise* have greatly discouraged, if not utterly deterred, us. ^a *We may now come boldly unto the Throne of Grace*: Especially if, in Compliance with His last and fullest Direction to Mankind upon this Article, we so far acknowledge our Unfitness for the high Privilege of *directly* approaching Him, as to *Ask in the Name*, not of departed Saints or even of Angels, but of ^b *the one Mediator, His beloved Son*; in whom He has declared *Himself well pleased*. A Direction, which at once removes all Objection to the Propriety of this Duty, and affords the humble-minded Christian the strongest Inducement to ^c *continue instant in it*, the most comfortable Hopes of Its prevailing Efficacy.

We readily acknowledge, that now, under the Gospel-Dispensation, especially since the

^a Heb. IV. 16. ^b 1 Tim. II. 5. Matt. III. 17. ^c Rom. XII. 12.

authentick Revelation of GOD's Will has been closed, and *Miracles* have *ceased*, the best of Men are seldom favoured with any such *direct Answers* as are recorded to have been given, not only to the *High-Priest* asking Counsel of GOD in a Way peculiar to the *Jewish Oeconomy*, but to other pious Persons spreading their Cases and *pouring out their Hearts before Him*. Not but that, *even then*, we find Him sometimes represented as ^a *a God that hideth Himself*. And, if, notwithstanding, Good Men constantly addressed Him, as ^b *the GOD that beareth Prayer*; it should be sufficient for *Our Encouragement* to be told by *Himself*, that, though we may not always receive immediate Answers, ^c *we ought always to Pray, and not to faint*. Neither is it at all necessary, that we should be able with Exactness to *distinguish* such Vouchsafements of Favour as are granted in Return for our humble Petitions, from the ordinary Evidences of His Beneficence and Goodness. If the same Kind of Assistance from above be not in these Days given, or in the same distinguishable Manner, as in the Days of old; still we are assured, that devout Application for such Assistance, as may be yet wanted, *is our reasonable Service*. And, where we cannot *clearly* trace the

^a Isai. XLV. 15.^b Psal. LXV. 2.^c Luk. XVIII. 1.

Footsteps of a Divine Interposition, we may see Reason enough to rest satisfied, that *our Prayers have not returned empty into our Bosoms*. We cannot err in ascribing every *Blessing* we have to the Bounty of Providence: Nor will any of our Enjoyments lose its Relish by being considered as the *Gift of God*.

Before I conclude this Head, You will permit me briefly to apply what has been observed upon the Propriety and Efficacy of Asking from God *Wisdom in general*, to some of the principal *Kinds of Wisdom*, and such as are the most usual Objects of Men's Aims and Pursuits.

Nor will even *the Wisdom of This World*, so much of it, I mean, as can deserve to be called *Wisdom*; (for I meddle not with that low Cunning which sometimes *usurps* the Name) need to be *wholly* left out of *This Application*: So far otherwise, that (I am persuaded) the wisest Manager of secular Affairs may find the Time he has employed in exploring the Favour of Heaven, sooner or later, turning to the best Account. It is Matter of common Observation, how much the outward Prosperity, and (which is of far greater Moment) the inward Satisfaction and Happiness of the MAN generally depends upon the first Setting forward of the YOUTH; upon his
own

own Choice, or the Choice made for him, of his Occupation or Profession, of his Companions and his Friends. The Adjustment of These Points, therefore, must be *one* principal Object of Worldly Wisdom: Nor, indeed, *can* the Young Man proceed upon too mature Deliberation, or with too *good Advice*, where he is so nearly interested. Yet, when all is done, our best-formed Judgments can, in Cases of This Nature, rise no higher than to probable Conjectures. And, to whom can we so properly have Recourse, jointly with our other Methods of Consultation, as to That wise and good Being, who alone sees whether *Poverty* or *Riches*, whether an obscure or an elevated Station, or (which seems generally most eligible) a *Mean* between the Two Extremes, is best suited to our Abilities or our Tempers; and who only is able to *feed us with Food*, or to place us in a Situation, *convenient for us*.

Then, as to That important Branch of human Wisdom, which is employed in *Governing Ourselves*, or in rightly ordering our Affections and Actions: ^b *The Fear of the LORD* is certainly *the Beginning of This Wisdom*, and Application to Him not only the instituted Means, but one of the best Natural Methods,

a Prov. XXX. 8.

b Psal. CXI. 10.

for attaining it. ^a*Into a malicious Soul*, as the Son of *Sirach* hath observed, *Wisdom shall not enter, nor dwell in a Body that is subject unto Sin*. And we *Christians* know, from yet higher Authority, that ^b*fleshly Lusts war against the Soul*; They ^c*grieve God's holy Spirit* which dwelleth in us, and ^d*quench His Blessed Influences*. But here, devout *Prayer* comes in to our Relief: *This*, when duly performed, not only conciliates the needful Succours of *Divine Grace*, but strengthens our Rational Powers, and checks the Impetuosity of our craving Appetites. Accordingly, we find our LORD, who *knew what was in Man*, and His Apostles after His Example, almost constantly joining *Prayer* with *Watching* in their Exhortations upon This Point.

Yet, if possible, still more expedient must it be to *ask of God That Wisdom*, which is to give us Understanding in ^e*the Things of God*. *These* (as *St. Paul* informs us) *the Natural Man receiveth not, neither can he know them; because they are spiritually discerned*. I am aware, This Declaration may seem to relate to the *Original Discovery* of the saving Truths of the Gospel, and to Man's Inability of arriving at the Knowledge of them by any Na-

a *Wisd. I. 4.*

d *1 Theff. V. 19.*

b *1 Pet. II. 11.*

e *1 Cor. II. 14.*

c *Eph. IV. 30.*

tural Powers of his own, rather than to the *ordinary Attainment* of such Knowledge *after* they are revealed: In respect of which our Rational Faculties may certainly be of Use, and cannot be too faithfully exercised. However, what has just been observed of the Efficacy of Devotion in regard to *Moral Wisdom* is yet more applicable to *Divine Knowledge*. Frequent Prayer is not less needful to the Support of our Spiritual Life, than regular Food is to the Sustenance of our Animal Frame. And as to Improvement in Christian Knowledge and Practice; Prayer is not only by God's Appoinment a Condition, but in its own Tendency an Instrument thereof: By elevating our Thoughts it enlarges our Spiritual Capacity, and by calming our inferiour Passions, it prepares us for the Illapses of the *Spirit of Grace*: The *Reality* of whose Operations upon our Spirits it cannot surely be more difficult to *believe*, than That of many other Things, about whose *Existence* we have no Doubt, though we are equally unable to *define* the *Manner* of them. — And yet, after all, one of the *safest* Methods with *Many*, and a necessary Method with us *All*, of Asking from God spiritual Wisdom, is That of Seeking his Direction, and *hearkening what He saith to us*, in the *standing Revelation* He hath given

given us : Not so much relying upon Extraordinary Illuminations, which we have no peculiar Right to expect, and concerning which we may easily mistake ; as upon the ordinary Influences of *Divine Grace*, *assisting* our own sincere Endeavours, and accompanying the *Means* of God's Appointment : Such as *Reading* and *Meditating* upon His written *Word*, and devoutly Attending His *Worship* and *Ordinances*, in *Communion* with His *Church* : In which Methods the Generality of Christians may always best satisfy themselves, that They are regularly consulting *the Oracles of God*, and obtaining That Information, which will *make them wise unto Salvation*. — But to return.

Even, in regard to *Human Learning*, That Wisdom, which Men's own painful Study may seem most capable of acquiring : *This* also, as far as it is desirable (and desirable, surely, it must be in its proper Order) may with great Propriety have a Place in our Addresses to *the Father of Lights*. If God Himself declares to *Moses*, that He ^a *putteth Wisdom in the Hearts of all that are wise-hearted in all Manner of Workmanship* ; and if Skill in *Agriculture* is by *Isaiab* expressly said to ^b *come from Him* : Such Attainments as seem more

^a Exod. XXXI. 5, 6.

^b Isai. XXVIII. 29.

directly *Intellectual*, cannot but, with at least equal Reason, be asked of, or ascribed to, *the God of the Spirits of all Flesh*. He is the Author and Preserver of all our Faculties. *“In Him we live, and move, and have our Being.* And, as He must, therefore, be constantly present with our Minds, and conscious of all their Workings; He can (we may be sure) always adapt, either His ordinary Influences, or (if ever He thinks fit) His extraordinary Interpositions, to their Operations, agreeably to the Nature Himself hath given them. There is, indeed, Something not easy to be *Otherwise* accounted for, not only in Those sudden Turns of Thought and Changes of Resolution in the *common Affairs* of Life, which yet are often found to have been of no small Importance to the Persons concerned; but also in the Advances sometimes made, and Discoveries struck out, by *studious Men*; in Ways not less surprising to themselves than to Others: As if (which was once said of King *Saul*)
“God gave them another Heart on such Occasions. But, without entering farther into a Subject, which it may be neither easy nor needful to explain; I shall leave with You the remarkable Words of *Elibu*: *“God speaketh once, yea twice, yet Man perceiveth it not:*

^a Acts XVII. 28. ^b 1 Sam. X. 9. ^c Job XXXIII. 14.

" In a Dream, in a Vision of the Night ; when deep Sleep falleth upon Men ; in Slumberings upon a Bed : Then He openeth the Ears of Men, and sealeth their Instruction.

May I not add, that the same Seriousness of Thought, the same Abstraction from secular Cares, and Fixedness of Attention to an *invisible* Object, which Acts of Devotion require, must be proportionably serviceable in the Contemplation of *abstracted* Truths, and the Acquisition of *Mental* Accomplishments ? And as the *regular Exertion* of such Acts must naturally tend to render Those Qualifications *habitual* ; may it not be supposed to have a like Tendency (besides procuring the Assistance we implore) to qualify us for investigating the more abstruse Points of Science ? Any Excellency therein being known to call for all that disengaged Composure of Soul and Steadiness of Application, to which our Minds can be worked up in the Prosecution of them.

But, what might perhaps better deserve a distinct Illustration (would the Time permit me to enlarge upon it) is the Beneficial Efficacy of the Religious Principle, in regard to the *subsequent Exercise* and *continued Possession*, as well as the *first Attainment*, of This Kind of Erudition ; Or, in another View of the

same Thing, the Folly and Danger of a self-conceited Neglect of God's Blessing, not only as an Hindrance to our Improvement, but was a Temptation to the Abuse, and a Fore-runner of the Loss, of whatever Eminence we may be permitted to arrive at, in That Way. Let it suffice, then, just to intimate, how material a Difference may, at least frequently, be observed, between the *indevout Scholar* on one Hand, and the *pious Student* (though a Proficient of only an equal, perhaps lower, Class) on the other. *Should* the Former succeed (and I will not say, but that he *may* succeed) so far as to replenish his Mind with uncommon Treasures of Learning, and to produce to publick View many admired Monuments of it: Yet, while unrestrained by any such Reflections as *Piety* would suggest, how apt is he, like the vaunting * *King of Babylon*, to assume to himself the *Glory* of all his mighty Achievements, and with a self-applauding Consciousness to survey Those stately Structures, which he has, with so much Magnificence, been erecting! And, if he is not, like the same Example of fallen Pride, suddenly degraded from his boasted Pre-eminence, and deplorably reduced even below the common Level of Man's Understanding; how gene-

* Dan. IV. 30, &c.

rally is he found applying his un sanctified Knowledge to the Purposes of Ostentation, Insolence towards Inferiours, disdainful Treatment of Equals, Opposition to Authority, Singularity, perhaps Heresy, and at length Infidelity? Whereas, ^a *the Wisdom, which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable.* That Knowledge, which is the *Gift of God*, in Reward of diligent Study, recommended by undissembled Devotion and *Singleness of Heart*, is more modest in its Application, more beneficial in its Fruits. The Man of real Learning, if at the same Time a Man of rational Piety, is always ready to employ his Abilities, not in attacking decent Order and established Truth, but in defending and supporting them. He considers, that not only the extraordinary ^b *Manifestations of the Spirit* in the Infancy of Christianity, but the ordinary Communications of Grace in succeeding Ages, were and still are given to every Man to profit withal. If He, therefore, should be zealous of superior Gifts, or be conscious of any Capacity of *Excelling*, He proposes, not to astonish Mankind by some bold Paradox, but to benefit them by *sound Doctrine*. Not, by ^c *speaking perverse Things, to draw away Disciples*

^a Jam. III. 17.^b 1 Cor. XII. 7.^c Acts XX. 30.

after him; but, ^a *with all Lowliness and Meekness, to keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.* In a Word, He ^b *seeks that he may excell, not to the unsettling, but to the Edifying of the Church.* — But I hasten,

III. To subjoin a few *Reflections* suited to the Subject, by Way of *Conclusion* from the Whole.

And *First*, If a devout Frame of Mind, habitually *Trusting in God*, and on all Occasions ready to look up to and *Acknowledge Him*, be of so much Importance to the *Direction of our Paths*: Then, a little Time spent in the Cultivation of this Temper by *Religious Exercises* should not be grudged by any of the *Seekers after Wisdom*, as if it were thrown away or misemployed. Rather, surely, shall we, of *This Place* in particular, consider it as one of the most valuable Advantages which our present Situation affords us, that, whilst it enables us to cultivate every Branch of useful Literature, at a Distance from *distracting Cares* about the Accommodations of Life, it invites us to ‘*Seek first the Kingdom of God*, and to recommend ourselves and all our Studies to Him, *each Morning and Evening*, in the well-digested Forms of *Truth and Sober-*

^a Eph. IV. 2, 3.

^b 1 Cor. XIV. 12.

^c Matt. VI. 33.

ness provided by our Church. Many of You, I suppose, must shortly be called forth into a very different Scene of Things; where the same *daily* Opportunities for Publick Worship, that are here open to You, can but rarely be expected. And happy will it be for such among You as can no longer partake of these valuable *Privileges*, if You transfer *some Resemblances* of them into Those smaller *domestick Societies*, to which You may respectively belong. But happier still shall we all be, either here or elsewhere, if, by superadding to the Devotions of the *Temple* or the *Family* Those of the *Closet* likewise, we contract an *Acquaintance*, and maintain a constant Intercourse, *with the Father and GOD of our Lives*: By this Means securing, as far as on this Side Heaven we can secure, That ^a *perfect Peace* and Serenity of Temper which he only enjoys, *whose Mind is stayed on GOD*; and for which This *World* itself, with all its *Glories*, can furnish out no Equivalent.

Again: If GOD's Direction and Assistance be so necessary to the right Ordering of our Steps and the happy Issue of our Undertakings; then let each of us, before we engage in *any* Undertaking, at least of Moment, not only implore His Favour, but justify our

^a *Isai. XXVI. 3.*

Hopes of it, by first *Assuring our Hearts before Him*. For, if, upon an upright Inquiry into the Nature of our Schemes, and of our proposed Methods of conducting them, ^a *our Heart condemn us not* ; we may then proceed with Chearfulness and Activity ; with humble Confidence towards God, that He will either at present *grant us our Heart's Desire*, or by providing some better Thing for us, in His own good Time, *fulfil all our Minds*. But, ^b *should our Heart condemn us*, GOD is greater than our Heart, and knoweth all Things : And we may assure ourselves, that ^c *there is no Wisdom, nor Understanding, nor Counsel against Him*. Nor will it avail us to ^d *cry unto GOD with our Mouths*, or to acknowledge Him with our Tongues, so long as we regard Iniquity in our Hearts : Our Prayers, instead of being favourably heard by Him, will, in This Case, themselves be turned into Sin. ^e *The Sacrifice of the Wicked, as such, is an Abomination ; how much more when he bringeth it with a wicked Mind !* In short ; if we would ^f *so ask as to receive*, we must first see that we *ask not amiss*. We must wash our Hands in Innocency, before we beg God's Assistance, or expect that He should prosper our Handy-work.

a 1 Joh. III. 21.

b Ibid. 20.

c Prov. XXI. 30.

d Psal. LXVI. 17, 18.

e Prov. XXI. 27.

f Jam. IV. 3.

Lastly: If the Direction of our Paths and the Success of our Pursuits depend so little on our own Understandings, rather so entirely on the Providence of God; then, whatever our Accomplishments or Acquisitions may be, let us acknowledge Him as the Giver of them all: ^a Let not the Wise Man glory in his Wisdom, neither let the Mighty Man glory in his Might; let not the Rich Man glory in his Riches: But ^b let him that glorieth, glory in the LORD. The great Apostle, St. Paul, conscious of the Danger of being ^c exalted above Measure, to which Himself had been exposed, even by the Abundance of the Revelations imparted to Him, almost every-where sets himself, with more than ordinary Vehemence, to beat down the Pride, the spiritual Pride more especially, of his Converts, by This, among other Reflections; “that all the Advantages, ^d by which “ They differ from others, were really derived “ from their common LORD; and were there- “ fore Arguments for Caution and Fearful- “ ness, rather than just Occasions for Arro- “ gance or Presumption.” And, what hath any of us, that we did not receive? The reputed Favours of Fortune, the Endowments

^a Jer. IX. 23, 24.

^b 1 Cor. I. 31.

^c 2 Cor. XII. 7.

^d 1 Cor. IV. 7.

of Nature, the Rewards of Industry, and the Privileges of Grace — are they not all *Gifts of God*? Instead, then, of *Glorying, as if we had not received them*, or *setting at Nought our Brother* because we suppose him to have received less than ourselves; let us carefully employ our several *Talents* in the Service of the Giver, and for the Benefit of Mankind: Looking forward to That awful Day, when our ^a *Great Master shall come and reckon with us All*; when (in *This* Sense also) ^b *he that hath gathered much will find Nothing over*, Nothing beyond what he must strictly account for; and *he that hath gathered little*, if he have but been diligent in improving That Little, *shall find no Deficiency*.

To conclude. We are passing through a *World*, of no great Moment *in itself*, but in the *Consequences* of our Conduct in it of infinite Importance *to us*; where we find ourselves *in the Midst of Snares* not be guarded against, and of Difficulties not to be surmounted, by any Wisdom or Strength of our own. In *This strange Land* have the Descendants of ^c *Adam* been doomed to *sojourn*, ever since our Common Parent was *driven from Paradise*, for his *Distrust* of God's Di-

^a Matt XXV. 19.^b 2 Cor. VIII. 15.^c Gen. III.
rection,

rection, and his Affectation of forbidden Knowledge: And wretched indeed must *the Days of the Years of This our Pilgrimage* have been, had not the same GOD, in Judgment remembering Mercy, found means to ^agive us the Comfort of His Help again, and to stablisk us with His free Spirit: Had He not granted us His ^bWord for a Lamp unto our Feet and a Light unto our Paths. — ^cWho, then, is among You, that Feareth the LORD, yet at certain Seasons walketh in Darknefs, and hath no Light? Let him trust in the Name of the LORD, and stay upon his GOD. And, if some of our Fellow-Travellers, neglecting This gracious Offer from Heaven, will rather choose to ^dkindle a Fire of their own, and to compass themselves about with Sparks; though, after wandering in the Light of their Fire and of the Sparks that They have kindled, They can hope for Nothing but to lie down in Sorrow: Let us, by accepting His Guidance, ^egive Glory to the LORD our GOD, before He cause Darknefs, and before our Feet stumble upon the dark Mountains. Let our ^fEars with grateful Attention bear His Word behind us, saying, “This is the Way, walk Ye

a Psal. LI. 12.

b Ibid. CXIX. 105.

c Ifai. L. 10.

d Ibid. 11.

e Jer. XIII. 16.

f Ifai. XXX. 21.

“in it,” when we turn to the Right Hand, and when we turn to the Left. Or (in the Language of my Text) Let us, in all our Ways, acknowledge Him, and He shall direct our Paths. He shall ^a guide us with His COUNSEL, and after that receive us to GLORY!

a Psal. LXXIII. 24.

S E R M O N X V .

M A T T . XXV . 13 .

*Watch therefore : For Ye know neither
the Day nor the Hour, wherein the
Son of Man cometh.*

WE have in This and the forego-
ing Chapter one of the last and
longest, and, in many Respects
most remarkable, Discourses of
our *Blessed* LORD to His beloved Apostles :
And my Text in particular contains a Piece
of Advice which He inculcates through the
whole by *repeated Admonition* and a *Variety*
of *Illustrations* : A Circumstance, which must
itself recommend the Advice to our Regard ;
especially since we know that, in *this* Instance
particularly, * *what He said unto His Apostles*
He said unto All.

Now by *the Coming of the Son of Man* may
be understood, either that dreadful *Visitation*

a Comp. Mark XIII. 35.

of

of the *Jewish* People, which not long after ended in the *Destruction* of their City and Government ; or the *second Coming* of our LORD to judge the *whole World* : And it is probable, from several Allusions throughout, that He had *both* these Great Events in View. The *Former* of them however, though it may, like other Historical Facts, furnish us with many useful Lessons of Instruction, cannot now, as having been long since *past*, be to us an *Object* of *Expectation* or an Occasion of *Watchfulness*. And forasmuch as the *Latter*, (I mean, the *General Judgment*) was certainly at our LORD's delivering of this Caution, and may be even now, at the *Distance* of *some Ages* ; It has been usual, and cannot be improper, in applying His Reasoning and Advice to ourselves, to *substitute* in its Room, or rather to *join with* it, *another Event*, equally *important* in its *Consequences*, yet equally *uncertain* as to the *Time* of its Approach. And such exactly is that of *each Man's Death* in particular : An Event, which besides all other Motives to constant Watchfulness that it has in common with the General Judgment, has *this* peculiarly *awakening Circumstance*, that the *Time* of it cannot, though that of the *General Judgment* should, be *very far from any of us*.

From

From the Words then, considered in this View, I am naturally led to treat upon *Preparation for Death and Judgment*: A Subject, supposed indeed to be so generally well-understood, as to need to be but *sparingly inculcated* by the *Preacher*, or however but *slightly regarded* by the *Hearer*: But a Subject in itself of the last Importance to *Both*; and not the less so on Account of the Commonness of it. Want of *Consideration* is, in fact, in most Cases a far more general Hindrance to Men's Improvement here, and their Salvation hereafter, than Want of Knowledge: And whoever surveys the *State* of the World about him, will find Cause to think, that the Duty of *Watchfulness and Preparation for the Hour of Death*, however well-known, is yet by no means on that Account unworthy of a Place among our Publick Exhortations.

And, That we may employ our Meditations thereupon as usefully as may be at present, I shall take Occasion, from my Text as above explained,

- I. *First*, To represent to You the Nature of *Watchfulness*; and to specify some principal Ingredients in, and Concomitants of, this Duty. And then,

II. *Secondly*, To enforce the *Necessity* of the *constant* Practice of this Duty, from the *Uncertainty* of our Lives, and our Ignorance of *the Day or the Hour wherein the Son of Man cometh*.

I. *First* then ; As to the *Nature* of the Duty here required : If we consider *Watchfulness* in *general*, and without Reference to any particular Event ; it will imply, a sedate, thoughtful, and collected Frame of Mind ; a Keeping the Powers of the Soul *awake*, and the *Light* of Reason and Conscience (that *Candle of the LORD*) constantly burning ; a being on our Guard against *Treachery* from *within*, and in a Posture of Defence against *Assaults* from *without* : In short, a ^a *Keeping our Hearts with all Diligence*, and (in the Apostle's Expression) a ^b *Walking circumspectly* ; not as Fools, without Thought or Caution, but with the Care and *Exactness* of *Wise Men*.

But that *particular Relation*, which the Watching in my Text bears to our LORD's Coming, requires that our Thoughts should not only be kept *awake* and active, but have a *special Attention* to that Great Event. *Watching* then, in this respect, must imply, an *habitual Remembrance* and steady Expectation of

^a Prov. IV. 23. ^b Eph. V. 15.

Death and Judgment; a lively and *awful Sense* of their superlatively important Consequences to us; and a *proportionable Care and Solitude*, throughout our whole Lives, to prepare ourselves for them.

In short; the true Christian Watchman must be constantly *upon Guard*; always bearing in mind, that the present Life is a State, not of *Rest and Security*, but of *Duty and Danger*: That His Continuance in this State can be but *short*, and that he is *every Moment* liable to be *discharged from it*; that, notwithstanding this, his Behaviour in this short Life, and the Posture his spiritual Affairs are found in when *his LORD comes* to call him out of it, must determine his Condition of Happiness or Misery to *all Eternity*.

Not that by the Duty of *constant Watching* we are required to be *every Moment* of our Lives *actually thinking* of our LORD's Coming, or even for the greatest Part of them *directly* and *formally preparing* for it. The *Former* is in itself *impossible*; and the *Latter* would be *incompatible* with the *General Condition* of Mankind, and the several *Exhortations* in Holy Scripture to *Industry* in, and Attention to, the ^a *Business* of our Secular Callings. And, to go no farther, than to the *Parable* of which

^a Rom. XII. 11.

my Text is the Conclusion ; we find, that a *total Exemption* from *Slumbering* or from *Yielding* to the Calls for *repairing* our Nature, is *not expected* as a necessary Condition of our *entering in to the Marriage* ; but only such an *habitual Frame* of Mind as shall be capable of *speedily rousing* and recollecting itself upon the most unexpected Summons. For, we read, *while the Bridegroom tarried, They all, that is the Wise as well as the Foolish Virgins, slumbered and slept* : But then, the *Former*, having timely provided themselves with *Oil for their Lamps*, could *soon* become ready, and were accordingly *admitted* ; whereas the *Latter*, having neglected to make *such Provision* in due Season, were *for ever excluded*.

And thus much may suffice by Way of Description of *Watchfulness in general*, and also as it *particularly* implies a *State of Preparedness for Death and Judgment*. Indeed, since we cannot be in such a State without a Life of Obedience to *all* the Commands of God ; in order to give You a *full Account* of the *several Branches* of such Watchfulness and Preparation, I should give You a Catalogue of all the Instances of Duty we owe to God, our Neighbour, and ourselves. An Undertaking too *comprehensive* to be here engaged in. How-

ever, as *Holy Scripture*, and indeed the very *Import* of the *Term*, point out to us some Dispositions and Practices, which either *enter* into the *Notion* of Watchfulness or are *closely connected* with it; it may be proper to specify a few of these.

1. And the *first* that I shall mention is *Sobriety*. We find Watchfulness and Sobriety almost constantly joined together in the New Testament. Thus, ^a *Be sober, be vigilant*, says St. Peter; and St. Paul, ^b *Let us watch and be sober*. Our Blessed LORD has been particularly careful to inculcate the Necessity of this Habit of Mind, and the Danger of the contrary one. ^c *Take Heed* (says He) *that Your Hearts be not overcharged with Surfeiting and Drunkenness, — and so That Day come upon You unawares*. And again, — ^d *But and if the Servant shall say in his Heart, “my Lord delayeth his Coming,” and shall begin to — eat and to drink and to be drunken; the Lord of that Servant shall come in a Day when he looketh not for Him, and at an Hour when he is not aware, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his Portion with the Hypocrites*.

Had *Scripture* indeed been *silent* upon this Point, yet *Experience* and the very *Nature* of

a 1 Pet. V. 8.

b 1 Theff. V. 6.

c Luk. XXI. 34.

d Matt. XXIV. 48, &c.

Things must convince us, what an irreconcilable Opposition there is between *Intemperance* on one Hand, and such a Frame of Mind on the other, as can with any Propriety be called *Watchfulness*, especially when considered as preparative to our LORD's Coming. ^a *Fleshly Lusts*, in their Natural Tendency, *war against the Soul*; and in Proportion as we indulge and give Strength to the former, we necessarily weaken, and at length destroy, the Powers of the Latter. This is true of *all* the Powers of the Mind; but is *more eminently* so of Those, which are conversant about *Heaven* and *heavenly Things*. An habitual Indulgence in sensual Gratifications insensibly wears out the Impressions of Religion and destroys that Seriousness, that awful Regard to the Things of another World, which it *above-all-things* concerns us inviolably to maintain. The Soul, in such a Situation, is quite immersed, and as it were dissolved, in the Pleasures of Sense; and *cannot so much as lift up its Eyes unto Heaven*. — And, how amazing must the Arrest of Death be to any one in such Circumstances! What an *Account* will a Servant, thus surprised, be able to give *to his LORD at His Coming*!

^a 1 Pet. II. 11.

2. For the like Reason *Industry* is another Qualification, if not necessarily implied in the Notion of Watchfulness, yet closely connected with it. — It is *Solomon's* Observation, that ^a *Slothfulness casteth into a deep Sleep*. Our Faculties by Disuse become indisposed and unfit for Action. And by God's just Appointment a *Neglect to employ* our Powers either of Body or Mind is generally succeeded by an *Inability to use* them to any good Purpose. Accordingly our Blessed LORD (in the Parable immediately following my Text) represents *the slothful Servant* as not only missing his Reward, but as *losing his Talent* itself. Hence by Idleness we become not only useless but cumbersome to the Community in which we live: We fall below the brute, and even the inanimate Parts of the Creation; which all, some way or other, answer the End of their Being, and none of which can properly be termed, *Idle*. By this we disturb the Harmony, and break in upon the settled Order, of the Universe; whilst we neglect to fill up *our* Place in it honourably and worthily. And need I observe what the Consequence of this must be in another World? Is he fit to be transplanted into a Kingdom of Glory, and to *shine as a Star* in the other World, who has been on-

^a Prov. XIX. 15.

ly a *Blemish* and Incumbrance of This? Or rather, might we not have safely concluded, even without a Revelation for it, that ^a *the unprofitable Servant* would be finally cast into that State of *Darkness* to which his Inactivity naturally as well as judicially leads.

And if Industry in a *general* View of it, as it relates to our *Character* as *Men*, be so necessary a Branch of Watchfulness; how much more so must it be in reference to our high *Calling* as *Christians*? A Calling, which is indeed represented as an *easy Yoke*, and a *light Burthen*; and such it certainly is, either in Comparison with any former Institution of Religion, or with the Practice of Sin; at least after some Progress made in the Offices of it. But a *Yoke* and a *Burthen* it is, notwithstanding; binding us to several Duties, and subjecting us to several Trials, arduous *in themselves*, and rendered still more difficult *to us*, by our Indisposition, both Natural and acquired, towards them. Even the *Pleasantness* to be met with in a Virtuous Life does not (as indeed no true Pleasantness can) consist in an entire *Freedom from Action* and Employment. A *Religious Life* is a State of *perpetual Motion*, of *continued Progression*, in Virtue and Holiness. We *Christians* are ^b *a People* under

^a Matt. XXV. 30.

^b Tit. II. 14.

peculiar Obligations to be *zealous of Good Works*: We are bound by all the Ties of Gratitude, and encouraged by all the Affurances of Success, ^a *to grow in Grace*—^b *to go on unto Perfection*—^c *to abound in the Work of the LORD*. The Difficulties of our Christian Profession may be, and have been, misrepresented; but they need not be misrepresented in order to convince us, that we must have ^d *our Loins girt, as well as our Lights burning*, if we would approve ourselves Servants, that in earnest *wait for their LORD*.

3. This suggests to us another necessary Branch of Christian Watchfulness, I mean, *Heavenly-Mindedness*, or Indifference to the Concerns of this World *in Comparison* with Those of the other. I say, *in Comparison* only: For, whatever some *retired Asceticks*, some *over-strained Enthusiasts*, may pretend, whilst we live *in This World* it is not expected by Him, who placed us *here*, that we should either seclude ourselves *from* it or live *wholly above* it. But though we may commendably employ some Part of our Thoughts, some Share of our Industry, upon worldly Things, and shall *ordinarily* find it our Duty to do so: Still we must be careful not to let our *Affec-*

^a 2 Pet. III. 18.

^b Heb. VI. 1.

^c 1 Cor. XV. 58.

^d Luk. XII. 35, 36.

tion fix there. An Affection for this World, and an Acquiescence in the Possessions of it, must be very inconsistent with that Watchfulness, which implies a continual Expectation of being called out of it. Our Blessed LORD, in a Passage already hinted at, has in Terms very remarkable to our present Purpose, at once expressed the Nature and criminal Degree of Worldly Solitude, its fatal Influence upon our Preparation for Death, and our great Proneness to be overtaken by it.
^a Take Heed that Your Hearts be not overcharged with — the Cares of this Life ; and so That Day come upon You unawares.

Unawares indeed That Day must come upon the worldly-minded Man : His chief Good, his Treasure, is on this-side the Grave ; and he finds it necessary, in order to enjoy any tolerable Quiet, to put far from him, and as much as possible to forget, that uncomfortable Moment, which is to be the Period of his Happiness. And, ^b oh Death, if the Remembrance of thee is so bitter, how much more bitter must thy near Approach be, to the Man who liveth at Rest in his Possessions ! how unwelcome the Summons to ^c arise and depart from this his Rest ! how cutting the Thought of presently taking Leave of his beloved Treas-

^a Luk. XXI. 34.^b Ecclus. XLI. 1.^c Mic. II. 10.

fures ! how ** like a Snare must* Death needs come on all those that dwell, Those (I mean) that in their Hearts and their Affections *Dwell, on the Earth ?*

4. But farther : As Watchfulness denotes a State of Readiness for our LORD's Coming to *reckon* with us ; this should suggest to us the great Usefulness and Necessity of frequent *Self-Examination* and Reckoning with ourselves. This is indeed the best, the only Way of providing against a fatal Surprise at our *last Hour*. Thus much is very strongly intimated in our Saviour's Parables on the present Subject, particularly that of the *Ten Virgins*, from which my Text is *directly* inferred. Had the *five Foolish Virgins* frequently examined into the State of their Lamps, they might have timely supplied them with Oil ; for Want of which Precaution, *their Lamps were gone out* before they were aware ; and whilst they vainly endeavoured to procure it, *the Door was shut* and they for ever debarred from an Entrance to the *Marriage* of the Bridegroom.

To prevent any Miscarriage in an Affair of so high Importance ; the *good Servant*, who in earnest waits for his *Master's* Coming, and desires to make suitable Provision for His Reception, will *set his House in Order*, and have

it *swept and garnished*: That is, he will from Time to Time impartially examine into the State of his own Mind; what *bad* Dispositions or Habits he has by the gracious Assistance of God's Holy Spirit *subdued* and banished from it, and what *good* ones he has introduced into it; how many of the *former* Kind still remain to be weeded out, and how many of the *latter* to be planted and cultivated. He will examine carefully whether his *Practice* has been conformable to his *Rule*, and his *Improvements* proportioned to his *Receivings*: That so like a *faithful and wise Steward*, having his Accounts regularly stated, having corrected what was amiss, and supplied what was deficient; he may, without Anxiety wait for, and without Confusion or Terror enter upon, the awful Day of Reckoning; ready whensoever it shall come, to *give up his Accounts with Joy*; in humble Confidence of receiving his LORD's Approbation, and the Reward of his own Fidelity.

5. After all; one *necessary Concomitant* of Watchfulness still remains to be mentioned, and that is, *Prayer*. This is constantly joined with Watching both in the Exhortations of our Saviour and of His Apostles; and must be as constantly joined with it in our Practice, if we would have our own Endeavours
in

in any Degree successful. It is a just Observation, that—^a *Prayer without Watchfulness is a Mockery, and that Watchfulness without Prayer is Presumption.*—Our Spirit may be willing; and while the Spirit of God *worketh together with it*, we shall be more than Conquerors over all Temptations: But, without such Assistance, *our Flesh* will soon betray its own *Weakness*, and we shall not be able to *watch with our LORD one Hour.*—St. Peter thought his own Strength sufficient to carry him through with his Master in all His Sufferings; and accordingly we find him in a very sanguine Manner professing that ^b *though he should die with Him, he would not deny Him in any Wise.* He thought so; but his Master *knew* the contrary: And though He was pleased to *pray for his* over-confident but well-intentioned Disciple, *that his Faith might not totally fail*; yet He permitted him to experience the Frailty of his unassisted Resolutions: And has in Him left us all a standing Monument of the Danger of trusting in our own Strength; and a convincing Evidence, that ^d *except the LORD keep our Innocence, the Watchman (in This Sense also) waketh but in vain.*

^a South, Vol. 6.
^d Psal. CXXVII. 1.

^b Matt. XXVI.

^c Luk. XXII. 32.

Upon the Whole: Would we keep ourselves in a State of constant Readiness for our LORD's Coming? — We must, according to the Apostle's Expression, *"Gird up the Loins of our Minds and be sober; not permitting our Intellectual Powers to be enfeebled by Luxury, or stupified by Excess. Instead of This, we must be active and industrious in the Improvement of our Time and our Talents; and especially careful in the great Business of Trimming our Spiritual Lamp. We must withdraw our Affection, and (as much as our present Situation will permit) our Care and Solitude, from ^b Things on the Earth, in order to fix them with less Distraction and greater Steadiness on Things above. We must frequently turn our Eyes inward upon ourselves; examining carefully and conscientiously, what the State of our Spiritual Affairs is; how our Accounts stand with our LORD and Master; and whether, in fact, all Things are in such a Situation with us as we could venture to have them found in at that important Season which is to determine our Happiness or Misery for ever. ^c Praying always, that, whensoever that Season shall come, we may (by the Succours of Divine Grace assisting our Weakness, and supplying our Wants) be accounted worthy to*

^a 1 Pet. I. 13.

^b Coloss. III. 2.

^c Luk. XXI. 36.

escape

escape all those Things that shall then come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man!

Having thus endeavoured to describe the *Nature*, and to point out some of the most *eminent Qualifications*, of *Christian Watchfulness*, particularly as preparative for *Death* and *Judgment*: I shall now proceed,

II. To enforce the *Necessity* of preserving ourselves *constantly* in the State already described, from the Reason here urged, *The Uncertainty of our Lives*.

This is indeed the Point, to which both the Caution in my Text, and the Parable from which it is deduced, seem especially applicable. The *Ten Virgins*, as far as appears, had no Difference of Opinion about the Necessity of having their *Lamps trimmed* for their Attendance upon the *Bridegroom*. But the Difference, which gave *Five* of them the Character of *Wise*, and *Five* of them the Denomination of *Foolish*, appears to have been *This*: The *Former* considered, that the Coming of the *Bridegroom* was, as to the *Time* of it, very uncertain; and might, without *previous Care* on their Part, find them unprovided: ^a *They* therefore took such a Supply of Oil in

^a Matt. XXV. 4.

their Vessels with their Lamps, as that These Lamps might upon the most sudden Call be presently trimmed. Whereas the *Latter*^a took *their Lamps*, indeed, but took no Oil with them; They were either unconcerned and thoughtless about the Matter, or persuaded themselves they should have such Notice of the Bridegroom's Approach, as that any Deficiency in preparing themselves might safely be made up. In short, the *Former* resolved to do *immediately*, the *Latter* contented themselves with intending to do *sometime afterwards*, what *Both* knew was, *sooner or later*, necessary to be done.

And is not This, in fact, the very Circumstance, which distinguisheth the *Wise* from the *Foolish* in the great Business of preparing for the *Hour of Death*? That it is necessary to be found in a proper State of Readiness, upon That most awful Occasion, is a Point which (I suppose) no Christian can seriously dispute. But then, ^b*says the Fool in his Heart*,
 “My LORD delayeth his Coming: I have Health
 “and Strength sufficient for Years yet to come:
 “I have hitherto had no Intimations of any
 “Decay of Constitution: And surely, my gra-
 “cious Master will either give me Notice of
 “His Approach, or excuse any such Want of

a Matt. XXV. 3.

b Ibid. XXIV. 48.

“ Prepara-

“Preparation as Want of Notice may have
 “occasioned. What Need then of so much
 “*Haste* in providing, what may be provided at
 “more Leisure some Time hereafter?”

Our Saviour, therefore, *who well knew what was in Man*, that He might at once make Allowances for the *unavoidable Infirmities* of our Nature and Inadvertences of our Condition, and yet guard us against *Presumption* in habitual Sloth and Security, represents ^a *All the Ten Virgins as slumbering and sleeping, while the Bridegroom tarried*: When therefore ^b *at Midnight a Cry was made, “Behold the Bridegroom cometh; go Ye out to meet Him;”* we may well suppose, the *Wise* as well as the Foolish were a *little surpris’d* and startled. But then They were not, like These latter, *wholly unprepared*: Their Lamps were soon trimmed; because They had Oil before-hand provided: And so, being ^c *ready, They went in with the Bridegroom to the Marriage*. But the Success of the *Foolish Virgins* was very different: *These* had neglected to lay in a Provision of Oil *before* the Cry was made, and there was not Time *both* to buy and to employ it *after*: For, we find, though they used great Activity, and Dispatch for that Purpose at last, their Endeavours then proved too late:

^a Matt. XXV. 5.

^b Ibid. 6.

^c Ibid. 10.

** The Door was shut* before their Return; nor could their most importunate Entreaties for Admission procure them any *other* Answer than — “*^b Verily I say unto You, I know You* “*not !*”

You see, the Point, inculcated throughout the Parable, is the *Necessity of constant Watchfulness*: Not indeed a total Exemption from *Slumberings* and *Weaknesses* of our Nature, but such an *habitual Frame* and Temper of Mind as shall speedily rouse and recollect itself upon the shortest Warning. And the *Reasons* here intimated are, — The *Uncertainty* we are always under as to the *Time* of our being called out of This World: And — The *Certainty* of the *Exclusion of all* such from Eternal Happiness (that Marriage-Feast of the Lamb) who shall be found *unprepared* at *That Time*. The *Former* of which Reasons is expressed, as the *Latter* is implied, in This Conclusion drawn from the whole Parable; *Watch therefore: For Ye know neither the Day nor the Hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.*

And can These *Reasons* want any laboured Proof of their Truth; or can *we* want any long Enforcement of the Use here deduced from them? Were Mankind in general Those *reasonable* Creatures They pretend to be, it is

^a Matt. XXV. 10.

^b Ibid. 12.

certain,

certain, neither Proof nor Enforcement, in a Case at once so clear and so momentous, could be necessary. But, alas! the Solicitations of *Sense* and *Appetite* so frequently, I had almost said so universally, prevail against the Dictates of those much nobler Faculties, *Reason* and *Conscience*, that You must permit me, not so much by Way of Instruction as of Exhortation, to enlarge farther upon the well-known, but much-neglected, *Particulars* above-mentioned.

As to the *Former*, the *Uncertainty* we are under about *the Day or the Hour* of our respective Deaths; I am at a Loss *how* to set about any Illustration of it. If we do but give ourselves Leave to think at all, we can scarce miss of observing the curious Frame and Contexture of our Bodies; how inclinable they are in *themselves* to Decay and Dissolution; how liable to Diseases from within, and Accidents from without; and how numerous those Diseases, those Accidents, are. Or, if such Reflections should escape us, it is scarce possible we should continue for *any Time* in such a World as this, without being continually reminded of the same Thing by *a the Thousand which fall beside us, and the Ten Thousand at our Right-Hand*.

a Psal. XCI. 7.

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The Truth is, the Uncertainty of human Life is Matter of universal Observation, and almost universal Complaint. But our Misfortune is, that, while we *all* own this in *General*, *each* of us neglects to bring-home the important, but unwelcome, Truth to *himself*; as if each of us had literally ^a *made a Covenant with Death, and were at Agreement with the Grave*. Strange Infatuation this! and not to be exceeded or equalled by any other, but that of acknowledging the Uncertainty of Life, even of *our own* Life, in *Theory*, and yet at the same Time denying it in *Practice*, by neglecting to make the *only proper* Provision against any Inconvenience from it.

Which Neglect must appear (if possible) still more unaccountable, if it be considered, that our Lives are in God's Hand, depending, not on (what we call) mere *Accidents*, but on His good Pleasure. ^b *If He taketh away our Breath, if He do but cease to give it, we die, and our Mortal Part is turned to Dust*. And can we think ourselves in any Degree entitled to His Protection, whilst we voluntarily *renounce all Claim* to it by repeated Acts, by a continued Course, of *Rebellion against Him*? Can we *presume* upon His Forebearance, when That Forebearance is likely to have *no other Effect*

^a Isai. XXVIII. 15.

^b Psal. CIV. 29.

upon us, than that of giving us both Opportunity and Encouragement to abuse it. — Bad Men have certainly of all others the greatest Reason to expect to be *a cut off in the Midst of their Days*: And that *b Servant*, who presumptuously *saith in his Heart*, “My LORD de-
layeth His Coming,” is most commonly as well as most justly *surprised in a Day when he looketh not for Him, and at an Hour which he is not ware of*.

a To Day, then, *if Ye will hear His Voice*, *harden not Your Hearts!* *To Day*, whilst it is *called to Day!* *a Boast not Yourselves of the Morrow*; for *Ye know not what a Day*, what an Hour, *may bring forth*. Say not to any of God’s Messengers calling and inviting Thee to Repentance, “*a Go and come again, and to Morrow I will give;*” when *Thou hast it by Thee*. The *Morrow*, Thou relieest upon, may never be in Thy Power; or if it should, Thou mayest not *have by Thee* the Heart to set about the necessary Work, or the Ability to go through it. Say not to Thine own Conscience, *a reasoning with Thee of Righteousness, Temperance and Judgment to come*, “*Go Thy Way for This Time: When I shall have a convenient Season I will call for Thee.*” For

a Psal. LV. 23. b Matt. XXIV, 48, 50. c Heb. III. 15.
 d Prov. XXVII. 1. e Ibid. III. 28. f Acts XXIV. 25.

why must the friendly Monitor go away for *This* Time? *Another* convenient Season may never be offered Thee: Undoubtedly *not* a more convenient one than the present.

For — Art Thou *grown old* in the Service of Sin? Certainly Thou of All Men hast the worst Plea for shifting of the indispensable Work. The Youngest Sinner has no more than a Pretence for Delay; but, alas! Thou hast not so much as a Pretence, or even *Shadow* of Pretence for it. Thou hast no Hopes left but from That Mercy, which Thou hast already long abused. To *This* therefore *instantly* betake Thyself, with deep Self-Abasement, and sincere Penitence, fleeing for Refuge to *His* All-sufficient Merits, who *came into the World to save Sinners*. Thy Case, though deplorable, we hope is not yet desperate: ^a*Escape for Thy Life*, therefore, *neither stay Thou in all the Plain*: For, shouldest Thou yet *linger*, know assuredly, that inevitable Evil is ready to overtake Thee.

Or — Art Thou yet *within* the Years of *confirmed Manhood*? *The Time past of Thy Life* may surely suffice to have wrought the Will of Thine impure Lusts: A fitter Opportunity can never be expected for rescuing Thyself, and asserting Thy Freedom, from such a Slavery.

Thy Reason is now at its full Strength : Let it then have *its perfect Work* : At least let it have as perfect a Work in Thine everlasting Concerns, as Thou art careful to allow it in Matters of infinitely slighter Moment : And if in These latter Thou art willing to let slip no fair Occasion, no gainful Offer ; be as wise, as just to Thyself, in securing the incomparably more valuable, and if once lost more irretrievable, Interests of Thine immortal Soul. Nay,

Once more — Art Thou yet in the Bloom and Vigour of *Youth* ? Why, *Now is the accepted Time* : Thy Soul is *now* most clear of the Pollution of actual Sin, most free from the Tyranny of evil Habits : Thou art *now* most at Liberty to *remember Thy Creator* ; and Thy Remembrance of Him *now* will be most *pleasing* to Him. Whereas, shouldest Thou neglect the present Season, tho' another *should* be allowed (which yet is far from being certain, or even likely) Thy Passions will be more and more untractable, and Thy vicious Inclinations more importunate ; and Thou wilt find it, in all respects, more difficult *to do Good, after having been accustomed to do Evil.*

a Jer. XIII. 23.

We grant it *possible* for Thee not to die suddenly. Thou *mayest* be spared to Old Age; or Thou *mayest* have *Warning* given of Thy approaching Dissolution by the *gradual* Advances of It: Instances, we own, *may* be produced of Persons, perhaps as wicked as Thyself, who have gone to their Graves without any remarkable Distinction, in Point of Untimeliness, from Men of much better Character. And, what *has been* the Case of others *may* possibly *be* Thine. Nor shall we refuse Thee the Praise of *That Wisdom*, which is in other Cases allowed to Those who *needlessly* hazard Their *All* upon a bare *Possibility*. — Supposing, however, This were not only *possible*, but *probable*; nay and that it *should* in the End prove *actually* Thy Case. Consider, what it is Thou hast to depend on *even then*. Why, it is, that Thou shalt be both willing and able to *Repent* in *Old Age*, or upon a *Dying Bed*! that is, that Thou shalt have Inclination to set about, and Strength to go through, one of the most irksome and difficult Tasks in Nature, a Task indeed by *mere Nature* impracticable, — an *entire Change of Heart and Affections*! That, after innumerable Acts of Disobedience and Unfaithfulness, after numberless Mercies abused and Talents misemployed, Thou shalt, *notwithstanding*,

make Thyself ready for an *Interview with Thy LORD* and for an *Entrance into His Joy*! And *all This* at a *Time* when Infirmary or Sicknefs shall have rendered Thee *unequal* to the *ordinary* Employments of this Life! — And now, my Brethren, *think*, what it must be, on Pre-*sumption* of a *bare Possibility*, a Possibility too clogged with *such Circumstances*, knowingly to continue in a State of Unpreparedness for our *last Hour*! A *State*, in which *should That Hour* overtake us, we are sure not only to lose an *Eternal Weight of Glory*, but to be *miserable for Ever*! I say it again, *For Ever*! that is, not for a few Days, or Weeks, or Years, no nor Millions of Ages; but for a *Duration endless* and *unmeasurable* even in *Thought*; and which when all These Portions of Time shall be past and gone, will be no nearer to its Conclusion than it now is! — I am at a Loss for a *Name* for such a Proceeding! *Folly*, or even *Madness*, must become Sounds without Meaning, should They pretend to convey any *just Conception* of it!

May we all, then, be persuaded, *immediately* and without Delay, to put ourselves in a *Watchful Posture*, a State of Readiness for That *awful Event*, which may be near, and cannot be far from any of us. May no Temptation of *Youth* or *Health* betray us into Sloth,

or harden us in Licentiousness : Especially, if any of us have *already* dozed away too much of our Time in Unprofitableness, or misemployed it in sinful Pursuits. May we, *now* at least, ^a *awake out of Sleep*, and (in the Apostle's Language) *arise from the Dead* ; that CHRIST may give us *Light* !—We ^b *know not* at what Hour the Master of the House may come ; whether at Even, or at Midnight, or at the Cock-crowing, or in the Morning, of Life. But *This* we know, and to know This should be sufficient at once to awaken and encourage our Vigilance, that — “ ^c *Blessed are*
“ Those Servants, whom the LORD, when He
“ cometh, shall find Watching !”

^a Eph. V. 14,^b Mark XIII. 35.^c Luk. XII. 37.

S E R M O N XVI.

MARK XIII. 32.

*Of That Day, and That Hour knoweth
No Man. —*

THE *Day* and the *Hour*, here spoken of by Way of Eminence, are usually understood to denote the *End of This World*, and its immediate Consequent, the *General Judgment*. But, forasmuch as the End of each Man's *Abode* in This World is, *to him*, with regard to the Business of Preparing for that *great Audit*, the same Thing with the End of the World itself; I shall take the Liberty of applying the Words before us, by Way of *Accommodation*, to the Time of *each Man's* Departure out of This Life: It being a Truth equally interesting to us all, and perhaps more affecting, as being brought *nearer home* to ever Man's Breast, that *of That Day, and That Hour knoweth no Man*.

Man's

Man's Ignorance of the Hour of his own Death, is a Point which needs no Proof; and is indeed, by daily Observation, rendered so *familiar* as to make but a *faint Impression* upon the Generality of Minds. And yet, surely, it is a Subject worthy of our most *serious* Regard, especially when considered jointly with the *Consequences* of dying unprepared, as declared in That *Gospel*, by which we must all finally be *judged*. There is, indeed, something very *striking* even in *single* Instances of *sudden* Death: But the Case becomes yet more *astounding*, when, by the Appointment or the Permission of Providence, *Thousands* in a Moment *fall beside us, and Ten Thousand*, as it were, *at our Right-Hand*. The natural and reasonable *Inferences* from all This are undoubtedly the same, which are every-where inculcated, under a Variety of well-known Representations, by our Blessed LORD and His Apostles; such as, the *Vanity* of *confidently* projected Schemes of *Gain*, and the *Folly* of a *fearless Self-Indulgence* in the Enjoyment of it; the *Danger* of Security in a State of *Impenitence*, and the *Necessity* of *immediate Preparation* and *constant Watchfulness*. But, I am afraid, a very different Use is too often made of the Dispensation before us. We have been used to speak of *Death* as a Separation of *Soul*
and

and *Body*; and it is but too natural for the *Former* to entertain a fond Curiosity about the *Time when* This Separation from its intimate Companion is to take Place. But, when *Death* is farther considered as a *Passage* to another State, wherein our Happiness or Misery is to be *for Ever* determined by the Condition we are found in by it; *Reason* seems to join with *Instinct* in putting us upon the same Enquiry. Men begin to imagine, They have some Right to expect *Information* in an Affair which so infinitely concerns them. If They could but obtain Satisfaction in *This* particular, They take for granted it would be almost impossible for them *finally* to *miscarry*. The Conclusion too often is, that since God *doth* withhold this, supposed necessary, Knowledge from them, He will certainly make Allowances for any such *Surprise* as (They easily persuade themselves) the Grant of it would certainly have prevented. Thus the *Libertine*, who proposes to change his Measures one Time or other, yet hopes, if he *should* be unexpectedly overtaken in his vicious Courses, he shall find an Excuse in the Want of better Notice: Whilst the *Sceptick* makes the Denial of it an Objection against God's *Moral* Government, and pretends to doubt, whether He ever designs to *bring us to Judgment*.

It will not, then (I hope) be thought wholly improper, nor, considering some late *alarming* ^a *Occurrences*, altogether unseasonable, to enter a little farther into this Subject: Not by Way of *enlarging* upon all the *Moral* and *Religious* Improvements of such Events, which Your own Meditations will set before You to better Advantage; but in order to guard against any such *perverse* and dangerous *Conclusions* as have been just hinted at, and to *vindicate*, as far as we poor Mortals may presume to scrutinize them, *the Ways of God to Man*.

You will permit me, therefore, with the profoundest Veneration for the Majesty of Heaven, to consider the Point before us a little more particularly; I mean, “*Man’s Ignorance of the Day of his own Death, notwithstanding the important Consequences that are made to depend on the Condition he is found by It.*” And, I trust, the *Wisdom*, the *Justice*, and even the *Goodness*, of God, in withholding a more particular Information from the *Sons of Men*, will be fully vindicated; if it can be made appear, *First*, That *such Knowledge is inconsistent* with our present State, in respect to Things about us: *Secondly*, That it is *unnecessary* for the Purpose for which it is pre-

^a This Sermon was preached soon after the great Earthquake at *Lisbon*.

tended to be desired: And, *Thirdly*, That it would, in all Probability, prove not only *ineffectual*, but of *dangerous* Consequence to us, even in That View. — I am, then, to shew,

1. *First*, That the Knowledge of the Day of his own Death is *inconsistent with Man's present State*, considered with regard to Things about him.

For the Illustration of which it may just be observed, that the supreme Conductor of all Events hath been pleased to establish a *regular Connection* between Causes and their Effects, and to give to Man, *within* the Limits of his proper Sphere, a considerable Influence in the Direction and Disposal of them. Now it is well-known, that Man frequently makes such Use of his Freedom in This Respect, as that his own or some other Person's *untimely Death* shall be either the *immediate* or *remote*, either the *intended* or (as we call it) the *fortuitous*, Consequence of his Choice and Method of Acting. The plain Truth is, in the Midst of Life ** there is but a Step between us and Death*, Our Bodies *^b are so fearfully and wonderfully made*, that almost every Thing about us, the Air we breathe, the Food we eat, the Raiment we put on, may unexpect-

^a 1 Sam. XX. 3.

^b Psal. CXXXIX. 14.

edly become to us an *Instrument of Death*, or an *Occasion of Falling*. In this View, Those Deaths, which we call *sudden* ones, *many* of them at least, may be considered as *natural Consequences* of the present State of Things, and such as must be often happening without an entire Alteration, or (which would amount to much the same) a continual Interruption, of it.

Let me not, however, be here misunderstood.—God hath by no means put the Disposal of This Affair so *entirely* out of His own Hands, as to have left Himself *no Room* for any special Interposition. If He had, the World would soon be sensible of the Want of His over-ruling Providence. No: ^a *The LORD is King; the Earth may be glad thereof*: He still reserves to Himself the Power of *suspending* the Operations of *Natural* Causes at Pleasure; and of directing the Counsels and *influencing* the Determinations of *Moral* Agents, which He can easily do, *without destroying* their Freedom. And if, as our Blessed LORD hath assured us, ^b *not a Sparrow falleth to the Ground without our Father's Knowledge and Permission*; much less are the *Lives* of Men, His Principal Creatures in This lower World, *forgotten* or neglected by Him. Accordingly,

^a Psal. XCVII. 1.

^b Matt. X. 29.

the ^a Sacred History furnishes us with *various Instances* of Interpositions of This Kind, in Favour of Righteous and Religious Men, and in Opposition to Persons of a contrary Character. And though Interpositions of like Nature may not *now* be Matter of common Observation; though it might be great *Presumption* on one hand, or great *Uncharitableness* on the other, to pronounce any Thing too peremptorily in *particular Cases*; yet in *general* we need not doubt, but that Good Men are *still* under the *especial Protection* and Guardianship of Heaven: Whereas (to put it at the lowest) no one can say but that ^b *the Wicked* are often, on the Account of their being such, permitted to *fall into Mischief*. However, though we must *not* presume to *exclude* the Almighty from human Affairs, yet neither should we *introduce* His *special Agency* on *every Occasion*. That He should first establish a regular System of *Laws* in the *Material World*, and afterwards be *perpetually interrupting* it; or, that He should first endow *Man* with a *Freedom* of Choice, and then render it of little or no Use by *constantly overruling* it:—This is what we can by no means reconcile with His Wisdom or Majesty. And yet, as far as appears in the present State of

a Noah, Lot, Job, David, Daniel, &c. b Prov. XXIV. 16.
the

the World, *something* of This Kind *must* take Place, if such Deaths as we call *sudden* ones were to be *universally* prevented.

And then, as to Man's general Ignorance of future Events, his own Death especially ; it has (we know) been made a Matter of Dispute, indeed of much more Dispute than was (I presume) either necessary or proper, "*Whether the Period of each Man's Life is at all fixed by any irreversible Decree?*" Upon which I shall only here observe, that, though *That Period* may be so far *certain in itself* as to be known to That Being, *whose Knowledge is infinite*, and to whom it seems most rational to suppose (how incomprehensible soever the *Manner* may be to us) that *all Things are present* ; yet the *same* is also in such a Sense *Contingent*, as to leave Room for us, nay to render it our Duty, to use all lawful and prudent Means for prolonging it. But then, even for *this* among other Reasons, however *determinate* this Period may be in regard to God's Knowledge ; *it is not for us*, it is by no means agreeable to our present Situation, *to know the Times or the Seasons, which the Almighty reserves in His own Power*. For let us for once *suppose* This Ignorance removed : Either *Man* must have a *general Foresight* of Things to

come ; or each *particular Person* must have a *special Revelation* made to *him* of the Hour of his own Death. I forbear to recount the many Inconveniences that must attend upon *either* of these Grants ; as, what *Interruption* would be thereby given to the Affairs of Mankind in general ; what *Disturbance* to the Quiet of particular Persons ; and such like obvious Considerations : And shall only suggest This unnatural Consequence, which each of them must draw after it ; that Men would *see* the remote Causes of their own Deaths without a *Liberty* of applying proper Means to avoid them ; nay They must find themselves under a *Necessity* of *knowingly moving towards*, and meeting, those Causes : A *Motion* (I presume) which could not but appear in some Degree shocking, even where Death should make gradual and leisurely Advances ; but which in Cases of *Violence* (such as we have seen must sometimes be expected) would be *much more* so. And surely, *That Knowledge* may safely be pronounced *inconsistent with our present Condition*, the Grant of which would unavoidably be attended with such Consequences as these.

If the *Sceptick* should reply, “ All that is
“ here alledged may be very true, *suppo-*
“ *sing* Things constituted as we find them :
“ But

“ But *might* not an *All-wise* Being have provided against such Inconveniences by a *different* Constitution of Things *at first* ? ”
 — To such bold Enquiries (and such we must sometimes expect to meet with in the present Age, and I hope may be allowed on proper Occasions to take Notice of them,) Holy Scripture enables us to give a short and easy, and (if He will please to regard its Authority) a *satisfactory* Answer. The Condition of Man’s Life, as there represented, *was* in the *Original* Constitution of Things much better than it is at present. In what Manner our Habitation on this Earth was to have been terminated, we are not distinctly told : But *we are* told, that ^a GOD *made not Death, That* was introduced ^b *into the World by Sin*. And therefore to the above-mentioned Query it is sufficient to say, “ that GOD *did really* at first “ constitute Things differently from what we “ now find them : And that He is no-way answerable for the Consequences of Man’s *ab-* “ *using* his own *Freedom*. ” — We need not, however, stand to the Courtesy of the Sceptick to admit the Scriptural Account of This Matter. Let us *take* Human Nature as we *Now* find it ; and suppose Death to have been

^a Wisd. I. 15.^b Rom. V. 12.

originally as unavoidable as it is at present : Yet Experience will inform us, that the *Suddenness* of Death, even as That denotes the *Unseasonableness* and *Swift*ness of Its Attacks, but *too frequently* proceeds from Men's own Fault ; and (which is still more material) we are sure, the Suddenness thereof, as it denotes *Men's Unpreparedness* for It, *always* does so. The Proof of which latter Assertion will be a full Vindication of the Divine Proceeding in This Particular : And *This* will be abundantly proved, if it can be shewn, as was proposed,

2. *Secondly*, That the *Knowledge* of the *Day* of our Death is *Unnecessary* for the End for which it is desired, namely, to secure our Preparation for It.

And thus much, I suppose, must be allowed, if it shall appear, that the Knowledge we are already in Possession of is *sufficient* for That Purpose : As again, sufficient That Knowledge must needs be for the Purpose of such a Creature as Man, to which Nothing is wanting that can be requisite to *influence* a *Reasonable* Being, though it may not be irresistible enough to *force* an *Obstinate* one. Now, that we have *such Notice* of the Certainty of Death, and of the possible Suddenness of it, is most evident :

evident : *These* are the Things complained of ; and we cannot, surely, pretend any Want of Notice of That, the Knowledge whereof furnisheth the very Matter of our Complaints. And have we not *as proper* Intimation of the *Consequences* of dying prepared or unprepared ? It is owned, a *future State* of Rewards and Punishments is not so visible to our *Senses* as the Death which opens the Way to it : And the Cause is plain : It is yet *Future*. But neither do we want Evidence of *This* Kind to convince us that there *must be* such a State. We have *Reason* as well as *Senses* ; and if we make a tolerable Use of *That*, the Necessity of a Future Judgment will appear as certain as the *Justice* and *Veracity* of God Himself, and as indubitable as our own *inward Sense* and Perception *can make it*.

For if God be *Just*, i. e. if He *exist* at all (and that He does exist *all Nature* proclaims) He *will certainly* observe a due Proportion to the Merits or Demerits of accountable Creatures in dispensing Happiness or Misery, Rewards or Punishments : He will never suffer His *most faithful* Servants to go *finally unrewarded* ; much less, to be ^a *of all Men most miserable* ; and least of all, to be most miserable *on the very Account* of their faithful Ad-

^a 1 Cor. XV. 19.

herence to His Service. Every Instance therefore of prosperous Iniquity and of Piety in Distress, (and, I presume, notwithstanding the Refinements of a late ^a *Reformer*, not of the common Notions only, but of the common Experience of Mankind, *many such* Instances must have fallen under *Every-one's* Observation;) is a *certain*, I had almost said, a *sensible*, Proof that the present Life is not to be the *Whole* of our Existence; but that we are intended for an other State, a *new Scene* of Things, in which all the seeming Irregularities of This shall be clearly accounted for, and fully adjusted, And God seems to permit such Instances to appear the *more frequently*, in order the better to provide for our *Conviction* of this most important Truth, and the better to secure our constant *Attention* to it.

Nor has He left us to the Deductions of *Reason*, which *unthinking* Men would probably have *overlooked*, and which *artful* Men might have made a Shift to *elude*: But has confirmed this great Truth to us by *the sure Word of Prophecy*, the irrefragable Testimony of Revelation. The Passages, wherein a *Judgment to come* is expressly foretold, are too *many* to be *all* here produced, and indeed so *well known* that I need not produce *any* of them.

^a Lord Bolingbrook's Philosoph. Works, passim.

I would only observe, that Revelation has cut off all Hopes, with which Men might perhaps otherwise have flattered themselves, of making Preparation for Judgment in any *intermediate* State, any State besides this present Life; by telling us expressly that the Final Sentence will proceed upon ^a *the Works done in the Body*: That ^b *there is no Work nor Device in the Grave whither we are Going*: And that therefore *whatsoever* Preparation we find necessary, we should make it *with all our Might* in this present Life, which is every where represented, both by our LORD and His Apostles in their Discourses on This Subject, as our *only Time* of Trial for Eternity.

And, as if all This had not been sufficient to convince us in a Point where our Conviction is so necessary; GOD has given every Man an *internal Evidence* of a Future Reckoning, and (as it were) *graven it upon the Table of our Hearts*. To which coming as *unto a Living Stone*, we may read the different Natures and opposite Consequences of Good and Evil in general, and *feel* the Application made to our own particular Case. ^c *The Judgment*, it is true, *is not yet visibly set*, nor *the Books opened*. But GOD has abundantly supplied this Defect (if it really be one) by erect-

^a 2 Cor. V. 10.^b Eccl. IX. 10.^c Dan. VII. 10.

ing a Tribunal in every Man's Breast, and placing His own Vice-gerent, the *Conscience*, upon it. A Vice-gerent, which gives us, not only a convincing *Proof* of the *Certainty* of a Judgment to come, but an *Anticipation* of the *Sentence* then to be pronounced, and a *Fore-taste* of the Joy or the Torment which must for Ever ensue.

Thus are we *surrounded* with the shining Evidence of a Future State; and, which-way-soever we turn our Eyes (if we do not *wilfully shut* them) it is scarce possible we should miss of it. *If* we look abroad into the World, *it is there*: *If* we consult our own Breasts, *it is there also*: *If* our Reason *take the Wings* of Revelation, and *search into the deep* Things of GOD; *even there too* we find *this* among His Counsels, that ^a *He hath appointed a Day in which He will judge the World in Righteousness*. — And if, after all this *Labour* of divine Love to convince and awaken us, Death should find us *unprepared*; If we overlook the obvious Deductions of our *Reason*; *If* we *hear not* the plain Declarations of Holy Scripture; If lastly we attend not to the distinct, though *still small*, Voice of our own *Consciences*; *Neither should we be persuaded*, though the Day and the Hour of our LORD's Coming were

^a Acts XVII. 31.

actually revealed to us. And This brings me to shew, as was proposed,

3. *Thirdly*, That the Information desired would, in all Probability, prove not only *ineffectual*, but of *dangerous* Consequence to us.

I need not here assert, that such Knowledge if granted to Mankind, *could not possibly serve any useful Purpose*. To *serious* and *generous* Minds such a Grant, though by no means *necessary* for Those Ends, might however appear an *additional* Engagement to *Gratitude*, and (especially towards the Approach of the *Awful Day*) an *additional* Incitement to *Holiness* and *Heavenly-Mindedness*. — But the Question now before us is — *not* what the Consequences of this Discovery *ought to be*; nor, what they *probably would be*, supposing it made to a *Few* only, and those *Few* such as are *before-hand confirmed* in the Habits of Goodness: But — what the Effect would in all Probability be, supposing This Knowledge should *grow up with* us from our Infancy, and were communicated *alike to all*? — What Influence it would probably have upon Men's Practice in *general*? and particularly, what Efficacy it would have with *Those*, who (if it

be an Inducement to lead a Holy Life) do certainly most stand in Need of its Influence and Assistance?

And as to these *Latter*, I think the Case is sufficiently clear, almost without any Illustration. For, can we imagine Those Persons, with whom the Uncertainty of Life, and the possible, nay probable, Nearness of Death, are *ineffectual* Considerations, would *presently* put themselves in a more *watchful* Posture, supposing all their Uncertainties removed, and the precise Time *known* to be at some *Distance* from them? Can we imagine such a Discovery would engage Those Persons *immediately* to set about the necessary Work, who can at present venture to postpone it to some Time *Hereafter*, though (for aught they know) they may, long before that *Hereafter* comes, find themselves irretrievably undone for neglecting it? Charity itself will not suffer us to make such a Supposition. Such Men's Lusts and Appetites (we may justly apprehend) would take at least the same Advantage of the *well-known Distance* of their LORD's Coming, which They are now, on the most *uncertain* Grounds imaginable, so ready to take of the *presumed Delay* of it.

Nay farther (to speak freely) the exact Time of Death is a Secret, with which few, even

even among Good Men, could *at their first Setting out* in Life have been safely trusted. We see, in one of our LORD's Parables, recorded by St. *Luke*, the over-indulgent ^a *Father*, who gave to his Younger Son, *all at once, the Portion of Goods that fell to him*, found by sad Experience, that in so doing he had only given Occasion to his Intemperance and Encouragement to his Extravagances. And would not the Consequence prove nearly the same, were our *Portion* of Days given to us *all at once*, as it would in effect be supposing the precise Number of them were discovered to us, and each of us told, "so long shalt Thou live, and no longer?" Should not *we too* be prevailed on to spend our *Youthful Days in riotous Living*? Should we not be apt to forget our Dependence upon God for the Continuance of our Beings here; and to look upon those *Lives* which we held by so *certain* a *Tenure* as properly *our own*? — The Prospect of making Amends for all before our Departure hence, is a Temptation which Beginners in Goodness, even as Matters now stand, find it no easy Task to repell: But, were the Time of that Departure *fixed* to a *known* Period; it is plain, the Temptation would come more strongly enforced, and (we

^a Luke XV. latter part.

have Cause to fear) would gain a much easier Admittance. The Tempter might then more plausibly back his Proposals of present Gratification with Promises of future Impunity: And ^a*the Heart of the Sons of Men* would be still more *fully set in them to do Evil*, in Confidence of evading that *Sentence against an Evil Work*, which they might then assure themselves would not be *executed speedily*.

And what would in all Likelihood be the Consequence? Why, it may perhaps be fancied, that most Men would in Time *retreat* from their wicked Courses, and at least before the Close of Life, lay hold on the gracious Offers made to a *sincere*, however *late*, *Repentance*. But, alas! This is Mistaking, not human Nature only but, the whole Design of the Gospel; the *great and precious Promises* whereof were indeed at its first Promulgation graciously offered to All, however grown old and even *dead in Trespasses and Sins*, that honestly embraced the Terms of it; but which were never intended for the Encouragement of wilful Sin in after Times, or the Reward of any Thing but a *Life* of real and habitual *Holiness*. Besides, with regard to the Persons here supposed, what must become of that insupportable ^b*Load of Wrath which They have*

^a Eccl. VIII. 11.

^b Rom. II. 5.

in the mean while been *treasuring up to themselves against the Day of Wrath!* They would in all Probability, long before that Day approached, have sinned themselves *"past Feeling* (as the Apostle expresses it); and so, like some deplorable Spectacles we may sometimes behold, They would plunge into a new and unknown State without *Remorse* for what is *past*, or *Concern* for what is *to come*. Or, if the near Approach of their Dissolution should rouse up in them some *Dread* of what is to follow: Should it put them upon lamenting their Sins, only because they begin to apprehend the sad Consequences of them; and make them *think* they detest them, only because they can now no longer enjoy them: Should they in this Humour vouchsafe to make a Sacrifice to GOD of their polluted Affections, and be content to compliment their Maker with *those Days in which themselves have no Pleasure*: According to any Notion we can form of the Divine Perfections, He could never be *well-pleased* with so worthless a Sacrifice: Even Mercy itself could not *reward*, could hardly *save*, the Wretch that should offer it.

What has been here said amounts to This.
—The Information pleaded for, if communi-

cated at all, must be communicated to Men either *After* they have contracted Good or Evil Habits; or *Before*: Upon the *former* Supposition, it could hardly make Good Men better, and would probably make Bad Men worse; So that even in this Case it may safely be concluded to be at best *ineffectual*, and probably *hurtful*. But upon the *latter* Supposition, Human Nature gives us Reason to apprehend it would prove *yet more so*: It would by some be interpreted as a Kind of *Licence to sin*; and by others as an Excuse, at least, for Youthful Extravagances; and would *generally* have an Influence very unfavourable to the Cause of Virtue and Piety. Whereas, under the present uncertain Condition of Human Life, ^a God *hath given All Men every where* and in every Period of Life the strongest Reason imaginable presently to *Repent*. — The Dispensation we have been considering is therefore, in *this View* of it, so far from ministring to us any *just* Cause of Complaint, that we ought rather to bless our *heavenly Father* for thus dealing with us: For *not* giving us any *settled Stock* of Days or Years, nor allowing us to call the least Part of Futurity *our own*: For dispensing our *Portion* of Life to us (as it were) by *Parcels*,

^a Acts XVII. 30.

and making us continually receive from *His Hands* what could not so safely have been *trusted in our own*: In short, for so ordering the Moments allowed us here, as may best preserve in us a *grateful*, and at the same Time *awful*, Sense, how absolutely each of them depends upon *His Bounty*: By this Means *obliging*, and (as far as is consistent with our Nature) *constraining* us to *abide ever with Him*, that so *All that He hath* may finally *be ours*.

Upon the Whole. — Our present Life is a State of *Probation*; in which our Great Master, who placed us in it, appears to have done all that a *Wise*, all that a *Good* Being could do for us; having taken the *most likely* and (if we may be allowed to judge) the *only-proper* Method to secure our Preparation for, and Attainment of, Eternal Happiness. — He has given us Arguments of the Certainty of a Future State from without, and Conviction from within; and has made the important Consequences of our Management of this short Life *only not impossible* to be forgotten or unattended-to by us. And shall it now be alleged against the Execution of His Threats upon such as, *after all This*, will expose themselves to the Hazard of dying unprepared, —

a Luk. XV. 31.

that

that He has withholden from us the Knowledge of the Time of our respective Deaths? A Knowledge, which it was neither consistent with *His* Majesty and Wisdom to *give*, nor with *our* Condition to *receive*: A Knowledge, which, if it *could* have been indulged us, could hardly have been of any *real*, much less *general*, Advantage to Mankind; but which *might*, and in all Probability *would*, have at once made Men's Sins *more numerous*, and (at least according to the Objectors themselves) *less excusable*.

To conclude. — We see what little Reason we have, from the Uncertainty of our Lives, either to *question* the *Justice*, or to *presume upon* the *Mercy* of God. — Let us then be content to *take* the Threatenings as well as the Promises of the Almighty, *as we find them*, without those subtle Evasions or artful Refinements which our corrupt Hearts will always be ready to suggest to us. — Be it *our* Care to manage well whatsoever Time we shall find allowed us, without being either presumptuously confident on one Hand or slavishly fearful on the other, or anxiously inquisitive how much or how little may be still in reserve for us. — In a Word, since it is *always* uncertain whether the present Moments may be succeeded by Life or by Death; let

us endeavour so to employ them as to be, if possible, every Moment prepared for *Either* : That so ^a *whether we live, we may live unto the LORD, or whether we die, we may die unto the LORD* ; And then—*Whether we live or die, we shall be the LORD's !*

That We may All hence ^b *learn, so to number our Days as to apply our Hearts to the truest Wisdom* — GOD of His infinite Mercy grant, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD !

a Rom. XIV. 8. b Psal. XC. 12.

F I N I S.



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